

An investigation of the social, emotional, and character development practices and perceptions of
Kansas school-based agricultural education teachers

by

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B.S., Kansas State University, 2009
M.S., Fort Hays State University, 2022

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

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Abstract

For decades, schools have addressed students' basic needs from dental to eye exams in addition to teaching them academic content. Given the increasing concern for student mental health, many states have recently begun requiring educators to incorporate social and emotional learning into the educational setting. In 2012, the Kansas State Department of Education adopted a framework to promote social, emotional, and character development (SECD) competencies. The Kansas SECD standards provide a framework for schools to incorporate social and emotional learning (SEL) alongside character development, supporting students in their personal, social, and character growth. These standards include practicing citizenship, personal safety, problem-solving, risk prevention, and promoting a positive school culture.

This study investigated the perceptions and practices of Kansas school-based agricultural education (SBAE) teachers regarding social, emotional, and character development. SBAE teachers are uniquely positioned to foster these skills through the major areas of agricultural education that encompass the three-component model – classroom instruction, student organization, and work-based learning. The Kansas SECD standards and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning guided this research. The central question was, “How do Kansas SBAE teachers perceive they foster social, emotional, and character development in their programs?”

A collective case study was conducted to examine the perceptions and teaching strategies of six Kansas SBAE teachers to understand how they incorporate social, emotional, and character skills in their programs. The teacher participants were interviewed via Zoom using a semi-structured interview protocol. After the interviews, additional supporting documents, including pictures of learning spaces, lesson plans, and sample classroom rules and expectations,

were gathered from the teacher participants. The supporting documents provided triangulation and added to the credibility of the findings. The data collected through the case study was used to explain how teachers integrate social, emotional, and character learning in their classrooms and FFA chapters.

This study identified key themes related to Kansas SBAE teachers' perceptions and practices concerning SECD. Teachers saw themselves as both educators and mentors, roles reflected in recurring themes: SECD as a foundation, relationships and safe environments, and challenges of formal SECD. Additionally, four themes emerged in relation to how teachers implement SECD in their classrooms: creating a supportive and relational learning environment, intentionally integrating SECD through agricultural education, empowering students through responsibility, and modeling desired behaviors and attitudes for student development.

The findings from this study contribute to the growing body of knowledge on SECD within SBAE and can inform teachers, teacher educators, and professional development efforts. Additional research is needed to measure the impact of SBAE teachers' SECD practices on student outcomes. Teacher preparation programs should explicitly incorporate strategies to develop pre-service teachers' confidence and fluency in SECD, including examining ways to model positive behaviors, build strong relationships, and create supportive learning environments.

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Gaea Hock

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Dedication

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To my former students. Teaching agricultural education was profoundly rewarding. I hope I made half the impact you all had on me.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

In 2021, United States Surgeon General Vivek Murthy highlighted the significant impact of mental health challenges on young people (Ritchel, 2023). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021) reported in 2021 that 29% of high school students experienced poor mental health during the past 30 days, while 42% felt so sad or hopeless every day that they stopped engaging in their usual activities. Even more startling, suicide ranked as the second leading cause of death among adolescents aged 10-14 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023).

Schools have long been tasked with providing more than academic instruction to students. For decades, schools have had students' basic needs added to their plates, like screening for hearing, dental, and vision (Kansas 2023-2024 Legislative Sessions, 2022; Kansas Office of Revisor of Statutes, n.d.). As early as 1938, teachers were tasked with observing and reporting eye strain and visual dysfunction in students (Appelboom, 1985). Additionally, at the beginning of the 20th century, school administrators and teachers provided counseling services initially targeted at economic issues (Gysbers, 2010). Shortly after World War II, schools started providing nutritious and low-cost lunches, and later breakfast (Food and Nutrition Service, 2024). Today, educators are responsible for considering the mental health of their students as well.

Schools have turned to social and emotional learning (SEL) to address student mental well-being. SEL equips students with the skills to effectively navigate interpersonal and intrapersonal situations, enhancing their ability to think, feel, and act (Yopp et al., 2017). This includes critical competencies like teamwork and empathy, which employers highly value (Yoder et al., 2020). School-based agricultural education (SBAE), recognized for its emphasis on

character and citizenship development, presents an opportunity to seamlessly integrate these sought-after interpersonal skills into existing curricula through the three-component model (Akers et al., 2004; Marlatt et al., 2003).

The agricultural education three-component model provides a natural framework for integrating social, emotional, and character development. Designed to foster leadership, personal growth, and career success (National FFA Organization, n.d.), the model includes classroom and laboratory instruction, Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAEs), and involvement in the National FFA Organization. Through classroom and lab settings, SBAE programs offer contextual learning across a variety of agriculture, food, and natural resources courses (National FFA Organization, n.d.). SBAE teachers support students in developing personalized experiential, service, or work-based learning projects that allow them to apply classroom knowledge in real-world contexts through their SAEs. Additionally, SBAE teachers typically serve as FFA advisors, guiding students in leadership development through participation in FFA activities. Together, these three components cultivate essential character traits as well as interpersonal and intrapersonal skills.

SBAE is organized into national career pathways that align with industry-specific agricultural content and skills, preparing students for industry certification and post-secondary college majors (Thoron & Barrick, 2022). Within these pathways, SBAE teachers wear multiple hats, encompassing classroom and laboratory instruction, FFA advisory roles, and oversight of students' Supervised Agricultural Experiences (Thoron & Barrick, 2022). This multifaceted role allows SBAE teachers to establish connections and relationships with their students, providing mentorship and guidance in various facets of their educational journey.

The increasing rates of poor mental health among students present a challenge to education. Recognizing the role of SBAE in many schools across the country, there is a need to explore the link between effective teachers and the promotion of social and emotional learning and classroom climates. By conducting qualitative research and analyzing the practices of SBAE teachers, this research seeks to discern strategies and approaches that foster positive social, emotional, and character development skills and supportive classroom climates, ultimately addressing the issue of poor mental health among students.

Rationale

The growing concern about mental health challenges in young people has prompted educators and researchers to adopt practices that support student development. Schools increasingly address students' mental health and well-being through the implementation of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) or, more broadly, Social, Emotional, and Character Development (SECD). SECD encompasses a range of curricula designed to create "relationally healthy places for children and adults to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills" to foster social and emotional competencies (Durlak & Mahoney, 2022, p. 4). Research has demonstrated that integrating SECD into academic instruction can lead to improvements in both behavior and academic performance (Durlak & Mahoney, 2022).

Moreover, this approach aligns with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), which emphasizes that students must have their basic psychological and emotional needs met before they can achieve self-actualization and academic success. SECD practices help fulfill these foundational needs by promoting safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environments. As a result, schools implementing SECD have seen increased test scores, graduation rates, and post-

secondary enrollment, as well as reductions in school violence, bullying, and dropout rates (CASEL, n.d.).

In response to the importance of social, emotional, and character development, Kansas adopted the Social, Emotional, and Character Development Standards in 2012 to support students' holistic development (KSDE, 2018). These standards—grounded in research and collaborative efforts from CASEL, Character.org, the University of Kansas, the School Mental Health Advisory Group, and Kansas Education Service Centers—offer a framework for teaching interpersonal and intrapersonal skills that enhance student growth (KSDE, 2018).

Because of its unique structure and curriculum, SBAE is particularly well-positioned to support social, emotional, and character development. Through the three-component model of SBAE—classroom instruction, supervised agricultural experiences (SAEs), and FFA involvement—teachers are able to build meaningful relationships with students while providing experiential learning, leadership opportunities, and community engagement.

However, despite these promising connections, little research has been conducted to explore how SECD is perceived and implemented within SBAE programs. Given the distinct context of SBAE in Kansas, this study seeks to explore how agricultural educators understand and apply SECD practices in their classrooms.

Understanding how effective teachers promote SECD and cultivate positive environments within SBAE is necessary. Qualitative research can help identify the strategies teachers use to foster these skills effectively. Sharing successful practices has the potential to benefit other educators and contribute meaningfully to the growth and development of students' social, emotional, and character competencies.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this case study was to describe the social, emotional, and character development teaching practices of SBAE teachers in Kansas. The central research question of this case study is: “How do Kansas SBAE teachers perceive they foster social, emotional, and character development in their programs?”

Research objectives for understanding social, emotional, and character development in SBAE were developed for this study:

1. Determine teachers’ perceptions of their role in social, emotional, and character development.
2. Examine the strategies and practices teachers use to foster students’ social, emotional, and character development in their programs.

Operationalization of Constructs

For the purpose of this research, the following are defined as:

Social and emotional learning – the process through which young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions (Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, n.d.)

Social, emotional, and character development – practicing good citizenship as respectful, responsible, empathetic and ethical individuals, through making healthy decisions, practicing personal safety, understanding risk prevention, promoting a positive school culture, problem solving effectively, and valuing excellence (Kansas Department of Education, 2018)

References made to social and emotional learning also encompass social, emotional, and character development. When the Kansas State Department of Education adopted the SECD standards, they broadened social and emotional learning to include character development. The focus of this dissertation is on Kansas' social, emotional, and character development.

Mental disorders – clinically significant cognitive, emotional regulation, or behavior disturbances that cause dysfunction in psychological, biological, or developmental mental function processes (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 2013)

School-based agricultural education – a program of instruction available to middle and high school students encompassing the science, business, and technology of agriculture, fiber, and natural resources. (The Council, n.d.).

Traditionally certified – teachers who received their teaching license by obtaining education degree from a four-year university (KSDE, n.d.)

Alternatively certified – teachers who received a degree in a field other than education and completed a state-approved certification program. (KSDE, n.d.)

Early career teachers – a teacher with zero to five years of experience (Roberts et al., 2020)

Mid-career teachers – teachers with six to 15 years of experience (Roberts et al., 2020)

Late career teachers – teachers with 16 or more years of experience (Roberts et al., 2020)

CASEL Five – the five broad, interrelated areas of competence, including self-awareness, self management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. They can be taught and applied over various developmental stages (Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, n.d.)

Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) – a work-based learning component of school-based

agricultural education that provides students with hands-on, practical experience in agriculture

FFA – formerly known as the Future Farmers of America, the National FFA Organization, or FFA, is an intracurricular organization for youth interested in agriculture and leadership and constitutes one-third of the school-based agricultural education model (National FFA Organization, n.d.)

Limitations and Possibilities of the Study

Since the revision of the Kansas state social, emotional, and character development standards in 2018, schools have placed an increasing emphasis on developing students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes to become “respectful, responsible, empathetic, and ethical individuals” (KSDE, 2018, p. 7). The social, emotional, and character development standards guide teachers to help students make healthy decisions, practice personal safety, understand risk, promote positive school culture, problem-solving, and value excellence (KSDE, 2018).

This study has the potential to inform SBAE teachers about the positive effect of promoting and fostering positive social, emotional, and character development in their programs. Further, it can equip teachers with the tools to support students' holistic development by adopting effective social, emotional, and character development teaching strategies.

While the findings from this study may offer insights relevant to other SBAE contexts, the limited number of participants may raise concerns about transferability (Patton, 2022), and the results should not be generalized. This case study is a snapshot of current SECD practices and is limited to the perceptions of the six Kansas SBAE teacher participants. Further, this study relies on self-reported perceptions and practices from SBAE teachers, which may introduce bias due to social expectations or inaccuracies in their recollection of their teaching practices

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study's nature and time constraints prevented the researcher from examining students' perspectives of their teachers' practices. Student perspectives would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of Kansas SECD practices. Additionally, the researcher in this study has more than 15 years of experience in agricultural education in Kansas and has a professional relationship with many of the participants. Their time spent in the profession and relationship with the teacher participants may influence the results of this study.

Dissertation Organization

This dissertation is organized into five chapters.

Chapter 1 – introduction, rationale, research purpose

Chapter 2 – review of literature

Chapter 3 – methodology – epistemological perspective, theoretical framework, description of case, data analysis, data management,

Chapter 4 – results – profile of participants, key findings

Chapter 5 – conclusion – interpretation of findings, implications

Conclusion

The growing emphasis on supporting students' social and emotional well-being served as the foundation for this qualitative case study. This study examined the perceptions and practices of six Kansas SBAE teachers regarding social, emotional, and character development in their classrooms. Through an exploration of their experiences, the study identified key themes related to how SBAE teachers integrate SECD into instruction, the challenges they encounter, and the strategies they employ to foster students' personal growth. The findings highlight the role of SBAE teachers as not only content instructors but also mentors who shape students' character and emotional development. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on

SECD by providing insight into how SBAE teachers perceive their role in this area and their instructional methods. The results can inform SBAE teachers and teacher educators, helping to enhance professional development efforts and curricula that support student development. By understanding and addressing the barriers to SECD implementation, agricultural educators can more effectively prepare students for success in both their careers and personal lives.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Mental Health

Uptick in Student Mental Health

Adolescence is characterized as the period of development between childhood and adulthood, ages 10-19 (Santre, 2022). Adolescents experience changes in biological hormones, social environment, brain development, and cognition (Santre, 2022). It is assumed that adolescence represents the healthiest time in a person's life (Orth & van Wyk, 2022). As a result, adolescents have been overlooked in global public health initiatives (Orth & van Wyk, 2022). Despite the assumptions, mental health conditions burden adolescents. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported in 2016 that mental health conditions accounted for 16% of global diseases and injuries among adolescents (Orth & van Wyk, 2022). Depression is one of the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents (Orth & van Wyk, 2022).

Given the context of adolescent mental health, where nearly one in five adolescents are diagnosed with a mental health disorder, the critical role of peers and friend groups as a support system during this developmental period cannot be overstated (Roach, 2018). Mental health includes a range of mental, emotional, social, and behavioral functioning (Bitsko et al., 2022). Bitsko et al. (2022) explain that mentally healthy children function well in various settings, including the home, school, and community. Children and adolescents with patterns of severe and persistently poor mental health that cause impairment or dysfunction may develop mental disorders. The American Psychiatric Association (2013) defines mental disorders as clinically significant cognitive, emotional regulation, or behavior disturbances that cause dysfunction in psychological, biological, or developmental mental function processes.

Today, schools are tasked with addressing mental health needs among students (Ormiston et al., 2015). Between 50% and 80% of students who require mental health services do not receive the treatment they need (Ormiston et al., 2015). As a result, schools naturally become the common entry point for mental health services, with up to 80% of students receiving mental health support at school (Ormiston et al., 2015). The school becomes a natural context where students develop autonomy, security, and personal rights (Santre, 2022). Mental health promotion in schools requires implementing intervention programs that emphasize social and emotional learning and active participation in adolescents, schools, and communities. Evidence supports that school-based mental health programs improve mental health, well-being, and educational outcomes (Santre, 2022).

Adolescents spend a significant portion of their day at school, where educators and staff serve in loco parentis, acting in the best interests of students. As part of their role, educators must build relationships with students to recognize behavioral changes and identify signs of mental distress or suicidal thoughts (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], n.d.). Creating a safe and inclusive environment is crucial in fostering students' emotional well-being and encouraging them to seek support from trusted adults. Educators must also be prepared to intervene when students display warning signs of distress (CDC, n.d.).

Mental Health Risk Factors

Suicide is a leading cause of death among adolescents, ranking third for ages 12-18 and second for ages 10-14 (CDC, n.d.; The Jason Foundation, 2024). Alarming, suicide claims more adolescent lives than cancer, heart disease, birth defects, and influenza combined (The Jason Foundation, 2024). A 2021 survey reported that approximately 10% of adolescents had attempted suicide at least once (American Society for Suicide Prevention, 2021).

Disparities exist across race, genders, and ethnicity in youth suicide rates. The CDC (2021) reports that girls attempt suicide at 1.8 times the rate of boys, yet boys are more likely to complete an attempt. Additionally, American Indian and Alaska Native adolescents have the highest suicide attempt rates (American Society for Suicide Prevention, 2021).

In 2022, the Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services (KDADS) reported that suicide rates in Kansas are “sustainably higher than the national average” (p. 143). KDADS (2022) indicated that the highest rates of suicide victims were white, non-Hispanic males between the ages of 25 and 44. Additionally, the most significant increase in suicide rates in Kansas was seen in youth and young adults between 15 and 24 years of age between 2016 (7.9%) and 2020 (14.5%) (KDADS, 2022).

Recognizing warning signs of serious mental illness and suicidal ideation is critical for educators. Risk factors include a history of violence, such as child abuse, neglect, or sexual assault (CDC, n.d.). Individuals experiencing suicidal thoughts may express a preoccupation with death, feelings of emptiness or hopelessness, or talk about being a burden (CDC, n.d.). Other warning signs include social withdrawal, drastic changes in sleep or eating habits, extreme mood swings, and giving away prized possessions (CDC, n.d.). While not exhaustive, these indicators help educators intervene early and provide necessary support.

Schools and educators play a vital role in suicide prevention by integrating mental health services and fostering a supportive school climate (CDC, n.d.). Training staff to recognize and respond to warning signs is essential for early intervention (CDC, n.d.).

Knowing how to respond to students in crisis is critical for educators. If a student is showing potentially suicidal behavior, the National Association of School Psychologists (2024) emphasizes never leave them alone. Educators must act immediately and escort the student to the

schools' designated crisis response team to conduct a suicide risk assessment or call 911 if the appropriate staff is unavailable (National Association of School Psychologists, 2024). Educators should inform the student of each step they are taking and involve them when possible, reassuring them until a parent, mental health professional, or law enforcement is able to take responsibility. It is also crucial for educators to discourage gossip, but also monitor any rumors and report credible information to the school mental health professional or crisis team (National Association of School Psychologist, 2024)

Mental Health Access and Equity

Despite the prevalence of mental illnesses across the country, access to mental health treatment is a concern. Wang et al. (2010) report that countries of all income levels reveal low mental health care utilization. In their study, they found that in each country, at least two-thirds of individuals with common mental disorders were untreated (Wang et al., 2010). While mental health care is underutilized across the board, year-round utilization tends to be lower in developing countries (Kakuma et al., 2011). It has also been found that members of ethnic and racial minorities and low-income patients sought mental health services at a lower rate compared to advantaged and higher-income patients (Jimenez et al., 2014).

KDADS (2022) reported on the number of individuals receiving mental health services from 2016 to 2020. During this period, the rate of those served in community mental health programs remained relatively stable; however, the rate per 1,000 people served in Kansas was more than double the national average. Individuals aged 21 to 64 years made up 61.8% of all community mental health admissions, while those aged 0 to 17 accounted for 27.1%. (KDADS, 2022). In Kansas, females represented 52.4% of community mental health services compared to 47.2% for males. Conversely, state mental health authority officials served a more significant

number of males (18.6%) and individuals aged 0 to 17 (41.9%) over that same five-year period (KDADS, 2022).

Barriers exist that prevent individuals from receiving mental health care. Alegria et al. (2018) outline obstacles that stand in the way of receiving mental health care in Figure (2.1). The barriers to seeking and receiving mental health care can have a negative impact on individuals. Alegria et al. (2018) explain that untreated mental health and substance use disorders are associated with “premature mortality, productivity loss, high rates of disability, and increased risk for chronic disease” (p. 43). Schools address the barriers to mental health care through social and emotional learning programs to foster emotional intelligence, resilience, and coping strategies. By integrating social and emotional learning into academic curricula, educators can create positive and supportive environments that promote mental well-being and provide early interventions for students who may not have access to formal mental health care (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

Figure 2.1

Barriers to Receiving Mental Health Care (Alegria et al., 2018)

Eligibility
• Individuals who do not receive a specific required diagnosis are often ineligible to enter mental health programs.
Language
• The lack of linguistic capacity prevents individuals from seeking care due to communication barriers.
Legal Status
• Refugees, immigrants, racial/ethnic minorities face might be discriminated based on their legal status.
Information
• Lack of information regarding where and how to obtain care prevents individuals from accessing care.
Logistical & Economic
• Transportation, childcare, long waiting lines for services, high costs, and inflexible work schedules are logistical and economic barriers to care.
Psychological
• Beliefs about self-sufficiency, stigma-related and privacy concerns keep individuals from seeking mental health care.

Mental Health in Schools

While schools acknowledge the significance of mental health support, they frequently encounter challenges due to limited funding and staffing (Adelman & Taylor, 2010). To assist schools, the American Rescue Plan Act (2021) allocated \$170 billion for school funding, which many used to employ mental health workers (Abramson, 2022). However, this funding was temporary, leaving low-income districts unable to retain permanent staff (Abramson, 2022). Due to insufficient funding, schools have resorted to hiring mental health providers on a short-term basis and training teachers to adopt a preventative approach by equipping them with psychological principles (Abramson, 2022).

The lack of schools' access to mental health professionals is especially concerning when considering the number of students experiencing mental health disorders. The number of school-

aged children experiencing mental health disorders continues to rise, with more than 20% of children under 18 needing mental, emotional, or behavioral support (Adelman & Taylor, 2010; National Library of Medicine, 2022). Addressing these diverse challenges requires significant time and resources, making individualized interventions difficult to implement (Adelman & Taylor, 2010).

Although students spend significant time in school, highlighting the importance of adequate mental health support, many districts lack continuity in their approaches across grade levels (Adelman & Taylor, 2010). Students receiving support in elementary school may experience disruptions or changes in services upon entering middle school, exacerbating their struggles and hindering success. Additionally, schools often take a reactive rather than proactive approach to mental health, addressing issues only after they become severe (Adelman & Taylor, 2010). Increased funding and resources would allow for early intervention, preventative programs, and teacher training, helping students before mental health challenges interfere with learning (Adelman & Taylor, 2010).

The stigma surrounding mental health labels further complicates support efforts. While diagnoses such as ADHD, depression, and learning disabilities can guide interventions, they can also lead to harmful stereotypes and misdiagnoses (Adelman & Taylor, 2010; Ahad et al., 2023). Concerns over labeling may discourage parents from consenting to screenings and interventions (Adelman & Taylor, 2010; Ahad et al., 2023). Schools must focus on removing barriers to student success without over-relying on diagnostic labels (Adelman & Taylor, 2010).

Promoting mental health in schools improves academic achievement and reduces behavioral issues (Adelman & Taylor, 2010). However, addressing root causes is crucial. Most emotional, behavioral, and learning challenges stem from external factors such as sociocultural

and economic conditions rather than psychopathology (Adelman & Taylor, 2010). Schools can strengthen student resilience through programs to foster coping skills, personal strengths, and supportive relationships (Adelman & Taylor, 2010).

A positive school climate, cooperative learning, and consistency enhance student motivation (Adelman & Taylor, 2010; Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020). Social and emotional learning (SEL) provides a framework for integrating these principles into school culture and curriculum. Additionally, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) offer proactive strategies for establishing behavioral norms and managing student behavior school-wide (Adelman & Taylor, 2010). A systematic approach to behavioral management helps prevent and address issues across all grade levels and disciplines.

Emotional Intelligence

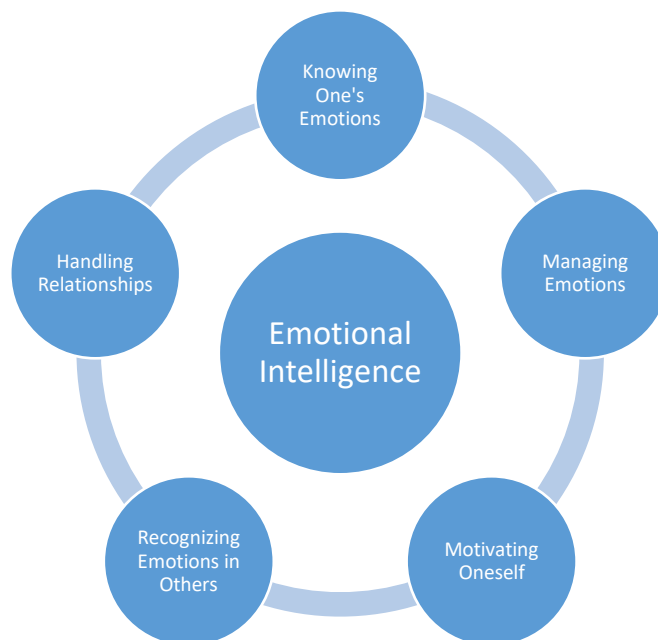
Background of Emotional Intelligence

Scholars like Goleman, Salovey, and Mayer have assessed the academic impact of emotional intelligence. Goleman (1995) posits that a student's academic achievement is marginally affected by their IQ, leaving their learning open to other factors such as social class and luck. Other scholars and psychologists support this view, that IQ is a more limited set of linguistic and math skills and does little to predict academic success (Goleman, 1995). This understanding of intelligence beyond IQ is particularly relevant in educational and youth development settings like agricultural education and FFA where social, emotional, and character development contribute to student success.

Emotional intelligence, Goleman (1995) claims, is a set of abilities that equip one with motivation, persistence, control, self-regulation, and empathy. Salovey and Mayer (1990), who are credited with origin of the term "emotional intelligence," describe it as a subset of social

intelligence or personal intelligence which can be classified as inter- and intra-personal skills. Interpersonal skills include a person's ability to recognize and understand other's moods and temperaments while intrapersonal skills are described as one's ability to "distinguish feelings of pleasure from one of pain" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 189). Salovey and Mayer (1990) offer a more explicit definition of emotional intelligence: "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (p. 189). Goleman (1995) expanded Salovey and Mayer's (1990) definition into five domains: knowing one's emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself, recognizing emotions in others, and handling relationships (Figure 2.2). Goleman (1995) outlines five key elements of emotional intelligence, beginning with knowing one's emotions, which highlights self-awareness or recognizing one's feelings as they occur.

Figure 2.2
Five Domains of Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, 1995)



Building on self-awareness, Goleman (1995) explains that managing emotions, or handling feelings, is the ability to soothe oneself and “shake off” anxiety, gloom, or irritability. The third domain, motivating oneself, is the ability to collect one’s emotions and is essential for paying attention, self-motivation, and creativity (Goleman, 1995). Further, motivating oneself incorporates the mastery of self-control, where an individual successfully delays gratification and stifles impulsiveness (Goleman, 1995). Recognizing emotions in others, or empathy, is a “people skill” that stems from emotional self-awareness (Goleman, 1995). Finally, handling relationships largely depends on the ability to manage others’ emotions (Goleman, 1995).

Emotional Intelligence and Social and Emotional Learning

Connections can be drawn between Goleman’s (1995) five domains of emotional intelligence and CASEL’s (n.d.) five domains, as both frameworks emphasize the importance of understanding and managing emotions. Goleman’s (1995) model includes self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, which align closely with CASEL’s (n.d.) framework of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Both Goleman (1995) and CASEL (n.d.) recognize the importance of self-awareness. Goleman (1995) describes self-awareness as the ability to identify and understand one’s emotions while CASEL (n.d.) explains it as understanding one’s emotions, thoughts, and values. Goleman’s (1995) self-regulation aligns with CASEL’s (n.d.) self-management. Self-regulation involves controlling impulses, adapting to change, and maintaining motivation (Goleman, 1995), while CASEL (n.d.) similarly describes self-management as regulating emotions, managing stress, and achieving goals. CASEL’s (n.d.) social awareness and Goleman’s (1995) empathy share similar goals. Social awareness includes perspective, appreciating diversity, and

understanding social norms (CASEL, n.d.), which aligns with Goleman’s (1995) empathy definition of recognizing and understanding others’ emotions. Both frameworks support the importance of communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution. Goleman’s (1995) social skills focus on managing relationships, while CASEL’s (n.d.) relationship skills emphasize teamwork, active listening, and positive interactions. Finally, Goleman’s (1995) motivation and ethical judgment aligns with CASEL’s (n.d.) responsible decision-making in that both frameworks support goal-setting and ethical decision-making based on emotional and social considerations. Figure (2.3) shows a comparison of Goleman’s (1995) Emotional Intelligence alongside CASEL’s (n.d.) Social and Emotional Learning.

Figure 2.3

Comparison of Goleman's (1995) Emotional Intelligence and CASEL's (n.d.) Social and Emotional Learning Frameworks

Goleman’s Emotional Intelligence	CASEL’s Social and Emotional Learning	Comparison
Self-Awareness: Recognizing and understanding one’s emotions.	Self-Awareness: Understanding one’s emotions, thoughts, and values.	Both emphasize recognizing and understanding personal emotions.
Self-Regulation: Controlling impulses, adapting to change, and maintaining motivation.	Self-Management: Regulating emotions, managing stress, and achieving goals.	Both focus on emotional control, adaptability, and goal achievement.
Empathy: Recognizing and understanding others’ emotions.	Social Awareness: Perspective-taking, appreciating diversity, and understanding social norms.	Both highlight understanding others' emotions and perspectives.
Social Skills: Managing relationships through communication and cooperation.	Relationship Skills: Teamwork, active listening, and positive interactions.	Both emphasize effective interpersonal relationships and communication.
Motivation & Ethical Judgment: Setting goals and making ethical decisions based on emotions.	Responsible Decision-Making: Making ethical and constructive choices.	Both support ethical decision-making and goal setting.

Emotional Intelligence in Education

Parker et al. (2004) found academic success was strongly associated with high emotional intelligence in high school students. They found top and middle academic students with higher IQ scores generally had higher levels of interpersonal, adaptability, and stress management compared to students in the low achieving academic group (Parker et al., 2004). Similarly, Petrides et al. (2004) found trait emotional intelligence, or emotional self-efficacy, was significantly related to scholastic achievement. As a result of their study, they believed students with high trait emotional intelligence had a better chance of psychologically stabilizing leading up to assessment, thus resulting in greater academic achievement (Petrides et al., 2004). Conversely, low IQ students are more likely to use resources outside of their cognitive ability to cope with academic demands (Petrides et al., 2004).

In a meta-analysis, MacCann et al. (2020) and Romanelli et al. (2006) support the idea that emotional intelligence can be a predictor of academic performance. They found students with higher emotional intelligence can manage emotions like anxiety, which leads to higher educational outcomes (MacCann et al., 2020; Romanelli et al., 2006). Additionally, emotional intelligence competencies help students understand human motivations and emotions and relationship-building with peers and teachers, both skills that can positively impact achievement (MacCann et al., 2020).

While emotional intelligence can predict academic performance, cognitive ability remains a strong predictor of success. However, being “smart and hardworking” is not enough (MacCann et al., 2020, p. 174). Students with higher emotional intelligence demonstrate greater knowledge of the causes and consequences of emotions and possess a broader vocabulary of

emotion-related words (MacCann et al., 2020). MacCann et al. (2020) emphasize that the ability to manage emotions is critical to academic success.

Emotional Intelligence in Career and Technical Education

Career and Technical Education (CTE) is offered in middle, secondary, and post-secondary settings to prepare students for a wide range of vital, skill-based, in-demand careers (ACTE, 2025). Research shows that emotional intelligence significantly influences career and technical students' well-being, self-efficacy, employability, and career success (Miniraj & Dwivedi, 2024; Viviano, 2012). As CTE programs evolve, many are integrating emotional intelligence through intentional training to develop students' adaptability, resilience, and problem-solving skills (Brackett et al., 2012). These skills associated with emotional intelligence enhance job readiness and collaboration, while aligning with employer demands for emotionally competent employees (Brackett et al., 2012).

CTE programs that implement emotional or social intelligence by encouraging open communication and mutual respect benefit individual students and the overall learning environment (Miniraj, 2024; Viviano, 2012). Classrooms that support emotional intelligence competencies are more likely to lead engaging and supportive educational experiences (Miniraj, 2024). A key approach that CTE programs use to develop emotional intelligence is by embedding competencies like self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation into existing curricula and teaching practices or through school-based prevention programs (Brackett et al., 2012). CTE educators do this by using real-world scenarios, reflective exercises, and collaborative projects (Miniraj, 2024). Real-world scenarios like role playing activities are especially beneficial in CTE fields as they require students to practice critical thinking and communication and recognize and manage their emotions (Viviano, 2012).

While researchers and practitioners recognize the importance of developing emotional and social intelligence in CTE, implementation can come with challenges. Haviland et al. (2021) explain that it can be difficult to determine the occupation-specific skills that employers desire when they ask for soft skills in their employees, highlighting the difficulty in translating broad concepts of emotional intelligence into industry-relevant competencies. Additionally, it is difficult to document how students have acquired such skills and effectively communicate those skills with employers (Paquier, 2023). The challenges exist in part due to the bias against CTE as a credible form of education, suggesting that historical perceptions can create obstacles when integrating soft skills associated with emotional intelligence (Hoyt, 2005).

Integrating emotional intelligence into CTE is beneficial for students and essential for preparing them to excel in their careers. By fostering skills like empathy, self-awareness and self-management through real-world application and collaborative learning, CTE programs enhance students' personal growth and career readiness and resilience. While challenges exist in clearly defining and measuring the emotional intelligence or soft skills that employer desire, the growing recognition of emotional intelligence's impact on employability and workplace dynamics highlights its value.

Emotional Intelligence in School-Based Agricultural Education

Literature surrounding emotional intelligence in SBAE is limited, with the most recent research being conducted more than 20 years ago. Despite the limited recent research, earlier studies have explored the connection between agricultural education and emotional intelligence. Akers et al. (2002) posit that the agricultural education philosophy lends itself to the development of emotional intelligence, noting that agricultural education incorporates practical application, knowledge, skills, and attitudes into real-world settings. Marlatt et al. (2003)

described skills needed in the workplace that could be attributed to emotional intelligence. They found agribusiness managers identified getting along with people, talking to customers, and recognizing and helping customers as essential skills for employment (Marlatt et al., 2003). Additionally, industry professionals seek teamwork, leadership, and problem-solving skills (Marlatt et al., 2003). Akers et al. (2004) found that teachers identified eight emotional intelligence areas as high-level success abilities through a needs assessment of school-based agricultural educators. Those abilities were the ability to cooperate, capacity to communicate, citizenship, confidence, life skills, self-control, self-motivation, and workplace skills (Akers et al., 2004). Conversely, in the survey SBAE teachers believed coping skills, curiosity, empathy, health promotion, managing relationships, mood management, negotiation skills, problem prevention skills, self-awareness, service skills, and social competencies were low-level student needs (Akers et al., 2004).

The findings from Akers et al. (2004) study suggest that SBAE teachers valued specific emotional intelligence competencies but may have undervalued coping skills, curiosity, empathy, managing relationships, and problem prevention. More recent research suggests that these competencies are increasingly recognized as essential for student success. Themes from CASEL's (n.d.) five core competencies of self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills were seen as the low-level needs by SBAE teachers. Today, education and workforce expectations emphasize interpersonal skills and adaptability, which align with the CASEL five. Additionally, given the mental health challenges among students, educators today recognize the importance of coping skills and emotional regulation characterized as self-awareness and self-management for academic success and career readiness.

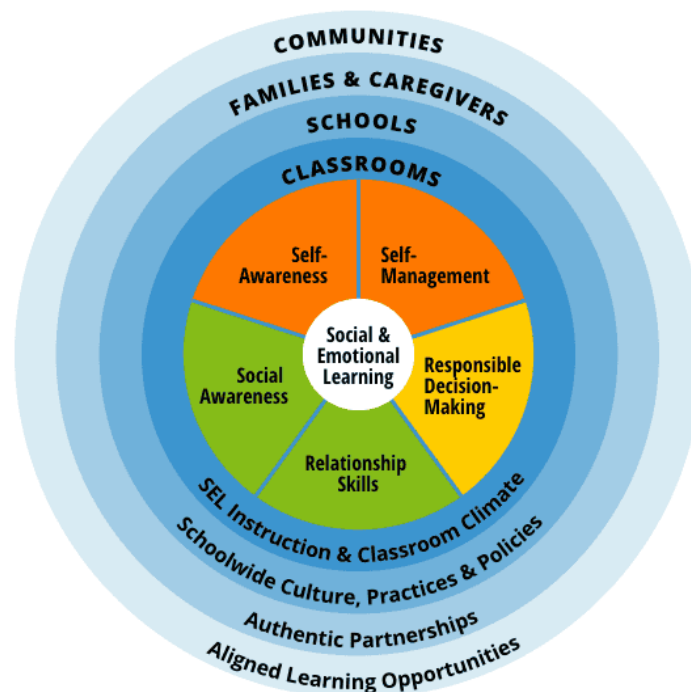
Social and Emotional Learning

History of Social and Emotional Learning

Collaboration for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a not-for-profit organization, was founded in 1994 with the goal of establishing social and emotional learning as an essential part of children’s education (CASEL, 2007). Based at the University of Illinois at Chicago, CASEL initially focused on gathering scientific evidence supporting the contributions of social and emotional learning to “school success, health, well-being, peer and family relationships, and student citizenship” (CASEL, 2007, p. 3). The evidence-based CASEL framework supports interconnected competencies to foster social and emotional well-being (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4

CASEL Social and Emotional Learning Framework (CASEL, n.d.)



While an organization for social and emotional learning was established in 1994, the roots of social learning can be traced to Colonial America and educational philosophers like Horace Mann, John Dewey, and Lev Vygotsky. In Colonial American schools, moral and character education was relied on teaching religious values (Gimbert et al., 2021). As public education became more prominent, the separation of church and state prompted an evolution in character education. Prevention programming like anti-bullying and drug education became common means of teaching morals and values (Gimbert et al., 2021).

Mann's common schools were open to all students, regardless of socioeconomic status (Center for Education Policy, 2020). Common schools promoted social harmony by fostering literacy and civic responsibility and eliminated poverty, crime, and other social problems (Center for Education Policy, 2020). Similarly, social and emotional learning emphasizes social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, which help create a just and cohesive society.

Dewey and Vygotsky emphasized social responsibility and social cultural theory (Deluna, n.d.). John Dewey, a leader in progressive education, believed that education should stem from real-world experiences and social interactions (Dewey, 1916). He posited that learning is a social activity and that students must take others into account when participating in educational activities, contributing to a learning community (Dewey, 1916). This type of democratic learning allows students to participate in discussions, collaboration, and learn to respect diverse perspectives (Dewey, 1916). Dewey's views on schools as model societies where children develop critical thinking and civic and social awareness align with the key elements of social and emotional learning promoted today.

Similarly, Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, believed children develop knowledge with the aid of a partner and modeling (Deluna, n.d.). Vygotsky posits that students learn when they participate in a range of joint activities and reflect on the effects of working together (Scott & Palinscar, n.d.). He believes that children develop when working with a knowledgeable partner, whether teachers or peers (Kozulin, 2003). Like Dewey, Vygotsky's approach to education and learning align with social and emotional learning by highlighting the importance of relationships.

Social and emotional learning continues to evolve in education today. Rooted in historical philosophies, social and emotional learning continues to equip students with skills necessary for academic success, healthy relationships, and civic responsibility. Organizations like CASEL continue to play a key role in advancing social and emotional learning by providing frameworks for inclusion in schools.

Impact of Social and Emotional Learning

Schools that implement social and emotional learning position themselves to address and promote positive mental health among students. Zins et al. (2007) explain that effective social and emotional learning occurs in safe, supportive environments. Schools must cultivate a caring and cooperative learning culture, establishing a sense of community (Adelman & Taylor, 2010; Zins et al., 2007). The focus should extend beyond academic achievement to facilitate students' holistic development by promoting their motivation and capabilities in the learning process. Educators must be prepared to cultivate learning environments where teacher-student relationships can flourish (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020). A deep knowledge of students' individual assets and experiences and social, emotional, and character development skills is needed to model those competencies to their students (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020).

Educators can engage students in learning by applying social and emotional competencies to real-life situations (Adelman & Taylor, 2010; Zins et al., 2007). Social and emotional learning can be integrated into the existing curriculum or as a distinct program (Adelman & Taylor, 2010). Further, schools and educators can enhance social, emotional, and character development through effective communication, high-performance expectations, classroom structure, and family and community involvement (Zins et al., 2007).

Yopp et al. (2017) defined social and emotional learning as how children enhance their emotional management skills and goal-setting abilities, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and effectively handle interpersonal and intrapersonal situations. Paolini (2021) explains interpersonal skills as essential communication elements such as listening, verbal and non-verbal communication, constructive feedback, teamwork, accountability, assertiveness, collaboration, and motivation. Intrapersonal skills encompass individual talents and abilities, including adaptability, self-regulation, grit, growth mindset, optimism, gratitude, social intelligence, leadership, time and stress management, critical thinking, and character. Notably, a growth mindset supports one's sense of agency while promoting curiosity and creativity (Greenberg, 2023). Capozzi (2017) defines a growth mindset as a commitment to ongoing growth and improvement, asserting that those with a growth mindset take responsibility for their lives. These skills form the foundation of social and emotional learning and character education, which share similar goals in promoting values and approaches that lead to responsible behavior (Akers et al., 2004; Goss & Holt, 2014).

Schools implementing systematic, evidence-based social and emotional learning or character education observe academic improvements, including higher test scores, graduation rates, and higher post-secondary enrollment (Akers, 2004; Durlak, 2011; Goss & Holt, 2014;

Mahoney et al., 2021; Porter et al., 2023). Moreover, prioritizing social, emotional, and character development contributes to a decline in violence, bullying, and student drop-out rates, underscoring the comprehensive benefits of this educational approach (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). Evidence-based SEL programs have been rigorously evaluated, and results are likely to occur (Mahoney et al., 2021). Durlak et al. (2011) explain that effective, evidence-based SEL programs often incorporate four elements – sequenced, active, focused, and explicit (SAFE). Programs that encompass the SAFE factors incorporate connected and coordinated activities, use active forms of learning, give dedicated time and attention to developing personal and social skills, and explicitly target specific social and emotional skills (Durlak et al., 2011). Such programming often entails a “comprehensive curriculum focused on creating relationally healthy places for children and adults” (Mahoney et al., 2021, p. 1134). Social and emotional curriculum can be incorporated in the school setting in various ways. Free-standing lessons can be taught to explicitly enhance students’ SEL competence, either in an academic course such as math or English or during an Advisory or Homeroom period (Mahoney et al., 2021).

SEL can also be taught through instructional strategies and supportive and culturally responsive learning environments, focusing on community building (Mahoney et al., 2021). By integrating social, emotional, and character development into the school environment through intentional programming and instructional strategies, educators can foster academic success and a positive, inclusive, and supportive school culture that benefits both students and staff.

Alternative Approaches and Gaps in the Process

In a research study analyzing the effectiveness of social and emotional learning of 1,200 schools in California, researchers found gender disparities and economic and racial gaps (West et al., 2018). Girls initially reported higher SEL than boys, but the gaps narrowed over time (West

et al., 2018). Economically disadvantaged students consistently scored lower in SEL (West et al., 2018). Lee et al. (2024) and West et al. (2018) also found disparities in racial and ethnically diverse groups. White students generally reported higher levels across SEL constructs compared to Asian, African American, and Latinx students (Lee et al., 2024; West et al., 2018).

Bailey et al. (2018) and Jones et al. (2017) outline barriers to effectively implementing SEL in schools, including poor fidelity or low use of program materials, limited local buy-in, lack of financial and personnel resources, poor integration into educational practices, and low sustainability. While important, many scripted and sequenced SEL programs are expensive (Bailey et al., 2018; Lawson et al., 2020). The curricula limit autonomy or choice, and schools struggle to identify the right time to implement them (Bailey et al., 2018). These obstacles create a need for an approach that is more flexible and attainable to implement while still meeting the needs of the students (Bailey et al., 2018; Lawson et al., 2020). Jones et al. (2017) add that guides for educators, families, and outside organizations should be created for grade ranges and domains like character and mindset to provide a flexible, cohesive approach to SEL.

Bailey et al. (2018) and Jones et al. (2017) explain that SEL should be organized around a developmental model that targets age-appropriate skills and utilizes flexible, low-effort strategies and practices beyond the curricula. For example, elementary educators may focus on recognizing basic emotions with their students, while high school teachers engage their students in more complex problem-solving and conflict resolution. Additionally, Bailey et al. (2018) explain the most effective learning opportunities occur when educators plan instruction that reflects their students' lived experiences. They recognize, however, that students' diversity and unique experiences presents challenges when trying to implement SEL curricula as they are often difficult to tailor to all students (Bailey et al., 2018).

Student self-report surveys and teacher-completed rating scales are commonly used to measure student SEL competence (Lee et al., 2023). Self-report surveys conducted by students allow them to rate themselves on a Likert scale and capture their perceptions of their social and emotional skills while teacher-completed rating systems allows teachers to provide assessments of students' social and emotional competencies (West et al., 2018). Both methods of assessment offer insights into student development to guide SEL practices and lay a foundation for accountability and decision making (Lee et al., 2023). However, social and emotional competence assessments are not free from the possibility of bias (Lee et al., 2023; West et al., 2028). Lee et al. (2023) explain that additional longitudinal research is needed to fully understand the growth patterns of students' social and emotional competence.

Teacher Preparation in Social and Emotional Learning

Teachers play a critical role in the implementation of social and emotional learning. Classrooms that foster positive teacher-student relationships support learning and positive social and emotional development (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). For teachers to foster positive environments, they must build their own social and emotional competence to shape their relationships with students (Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Murano et al., 2019). Teachers' abilities to handle student behavior, build relationships, manage classroom, and model positive social and emotional skills are highly associated with their own social and emotional competence (Murano et al., 2019). Teacher social and emotional skills are also associated with teacher retention and attrition; with higher competence reducing teacher burnout (Murano et al., 2019).

Teachers with high social and emotional competence are self-aware, socially and culturally aware, and have strong self-management skills (Schonert-Reichl, 2017) and are shown to foster student SEL skills through academic learning (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019). Teachers'

social and emotional competence impacts their well-being and their ability to provide social, emotional, and instructional support to students (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

While teachers play a critical role in the effective implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL) they have been historically underprepared for this responsibility. The inadequacy of training begins in teacher education programs, where pre-service teachers report that the SEL instruction they receive is often insufficient in both quantity and quality (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019; Murano et al., 2019). These programs frequently fail to bridge the gap between state SEL standards for students and the training provided to future educators, leaving teachers unprepared to recognize, interpret, and manage their own emotions (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019). In fact, many states do not include teacher education standards that address SEL competencies for teachers at all (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019).

In fact, researchers have found that few United States teacher education programs prioritize and integrate SEL with fewer than 46% of institutions indicating that they felt their practices were “very or extremely aligned” with SEL in teacher education (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019, p. 160). Other studies have found that teacher education programs only about one-third of teacher education programs require pre-service teachers to practice classroom management skills as they learn them (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). The lack of attention to training and preparing pre-service teachers lends itself to the high proportion of teachers feeling underprepared to address student social and emotional needs (Murano et al., 2019; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Addressing the gaps in social and emotional training for preservice and in-service teachers is critical to equipping teachers with the skills to foster positive classroom environments and support student development. Prioritizing SEL in teacher education programs by increasing the quantity and quality of training and aligning with state standards can help bridge the gap.

Further, teachers who can develop their own social and emotional competence can enhance student learning, improve classroom management, and reduce burnout, ultimately contributing to student success and teacher retention (Murano et al., 2019; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Social and Emotional Learning in School-Based Agricultural Education

SBAE encompasses the three-circle agricultural education model and includes the National FFA Organization (National FFA Organization, n.d.). While recognized as an intracurricular activity (National FFA Organization, n.d.), FFA actively integrates numerous activities and skills that promote self-esteem, cognitive needs, and self-actualization (Rose et al., 2016). Some studies indicate that extracurricular activities and youth organizations have a positive effect on adolescents' mental health (La Charite et al., 2023; O'Donnell et al., 2023). O'Donnell et al. (2023) found that students participating in extracurricular activities reported a reduction in feelings of depression. Extracurricular activities also allow adolescents to develop friendships and social competencies (La Charite et al., 2023). Furthermore, students involved in extracurricular activities and youth organizations have increased school engagement and achievement (La Charite et al., 2023).

Research supports that school culture, policies, and norms impact multiple dimensions of high school students' growth (Porter et al., 2023). Schools that prioritize social and emotional skills play a vital role in fostering better connections and nurturing higher-quality relationships among students (Porter et al., 2023; Akers, 2004). Further, students feel a stronger sense of belonging in their schools and put forth more hard work and effort (Porter et al., 2023). This emphasis on socio-emotional growth supports academic achievement and contributes to a healthier and more inclusive school environment, recognizing the significance of holistic student well-being.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943) can provide a foundation for understanding why SEL is essential in schools. According to Maslow (1943), individuals must have their basic needs, such as physiology, safety, love and belonging, and self-esteem, met before than can achieve self-actualization, or reach their potential. McLeod (2025) expands on Maslow's (1943) theory and explains that students who experience hunger, emotional insecurity, or lack of supportive relationships from family and peers may struggle academically. By supporting students' psychological and emotional well-being, schools can foster ideal conditions necessary for supporting Maslow's theory of basic needs (Recker, 2023).

History of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow (1943) proposed a theory of human motivation that recognizes the wholeness of an individual and focuses on ultimate, basic goals. He believed that physiological needs were not central to one's motivation, and instead emphasized the role of unconscious motivations and the idea that multiple needs can drive behavior (Maslow, 1943). Motivation, Maslow (1943) said, is complex, with human needs arranged in a hierarchy of "pre-potency" (p. 370) where one need depends on the prior satisfaction of another, more important need. An individual's surrounding environment can influence their needs, but it does not provide a sole explanation of behavior (Maslow, 1943). He explains that both an individual and their situation or environment must be considered in meeting one's needs (Maslow, 1943).

While Maslow continued to refine his description of humans' basic needs since his original work, in *A Theory of Human Motivation* (1943) he provides a foundation for what has since been depicted in a pyramid referred to as the Hierarchy of Needs. The pyramid contains five levels, representing the progression of human needs from the most basic to the most

advanced, as outlined by Maslow (1943). Each level builds on the one below, meaning the lower-level needs generally need to be satisfied before higher-level needs become motivating (McLeod, 2025). Starting at the bottom, with the lowest, most basic level, the needs are physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Figure 2.5). It is important to note, however, that needs are not strictly linear and that individuals often pursue multiple needs simultaneously (McLeod, 2025). It is also important to note that cultural variations prioritize needs differently, meaning how one satisfies a need may look different from another (McLeod, 2025).

Figure 2.5

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (McLeod, 2025)



Physiological needs encompass the most basic, foundational level in Maslow's hierarchy (Maslow, 1943; McLeod, 2025). These needs include the biological requirements for human survival such as air, food, water, shelter, clothing, reproduction, and sleep (Maslow, 1943; McLeod, 2025). Maslow (1943) further explains that unmet physiological needs can serve as major motivation for an individual and that “a person who is lacking food, safety, love, and esteem would most probably hunger for food more strongly than for anything else (p. 373). Once

an individual's physiological needs are met, they have a need for security and safety (McLeod, 2025).

Although safety needs are shown as a lower level or priority, Maslow (1943) explains that an individual may be “wholly dominated” (p. 376) by them and may serve as a catalyst for behaviors. Safety needs offer emotional and financial security, freedom from fear, social stability, health, and well-being (McLeod, 2025). These needs are generally fulfilled by one's family and society, including law enforcement, schools, business, and health care (McLeod, 2025). Safety needs for children may look different from those of adults. Maslow (1943) explains children prefer routine and predictability and thrive better in an orderly world. He further posits that children need “an organized world rather than an unorganized or unstructured one” (Maslow, 1943, p. 377).

The love needs, or love and belongingness, emerge after an individual's physiological and safety needs have been satisfied (Maslow, 1943; McLeod, 2025). In the middle of the hierarchy pyramid, love and belongingness refer to one's emotional need for relationships and connectedness (McLeod, 2025). The need of belongingness may be met through friendship, intimacy, trust, acceptance, love, and receiving and giving affection (McLeod, 2025). Maslow (1943) believed that an individual will strive to achieve affectionate relationships and a place in a group. He describes the desire for love may be so great for some that they forget about their lower-level needs like food and safety (Maslow, 1943). McLeod (2025) reiterates this, stating that the need for love and belongingness is especially strong in childhood and can override their need for safety.

“All people in our society...have a need or desire for a stable, firmly based, high evaluation of themselves, for self-respect, or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others” (Maslow,

1943, p. 381). With this thought, Maslow (1943) underscores esteem needs, the fourth level of the hierarchy. Esteem needs often include self-worth, accomplishment, and respect, and can be classified into two sets (Maslow, 1943; McLeod, 2025). The first is esteem for oneself, such as the desire for strength, achievement, confidence, independence, and freedom. The second is esteem from others, which includes recognition, attention, appreciation, and a sense of importance. Satisfying these needs leads to feelings of self-confidence and value, while failure to do so can result in low self-esteem, feelings of inferiority, and even “compensatory or neurotic trends” (Maslow, 1943, p. 379). Recognizing and supporting individuals’ esteem needs is essential for their well-being (Maslow, 1943).

The final level of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (McLeod, 2025) is self-actualization. Once all other needs have been satisfied, an individual can realize their potential and self-fulfillment and seek personal growth and peak experiences (McLeod, 2025). Maslow (1943) describes this need as “what a man *can* be, he *must* be” (p. 382). Again, self-actualization is different from one individual to another (Maslow, 1943). Because an individual’s self-actualization needs are dependent upon the satisfaction of their physiological, safety, love, and esteem needs, it is difficult to determine when or if one has fully achieved it (Maslow, 1943).

Career and Technical Education and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

There is limited research exploring Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs in the career and technical and agricultural education context; however, some researchers suggest the framework may be beneficial for understanding and supporting student motivation (Kroth, 2007; Rose et al., 2016)

One set of agricultural education researchers conducted a study to determine if participation in FFA supported students’ sense of love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-

actualization, tenets of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Rose et al., 2016). This study found that most of the surveyed FFA members' needs for love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization were met due to their involvement in various FFA activities such as Career Development Events (CDE) and leadership opportunities (Rose et al., 2016). The students who were surveyed expressed that FFA provided them a sense of belonging and gave them a place to "call home" within their school as a result of working on teams and travelling for FFA (Rose et al., 2016, p. 42). They also found students believed their self-esteem was boosted through FFA, again citing their participation in CDEs and leadership roles as sources of confidence and achievement (Rose et al. 2016). Additionally, FFA participation led to students' appreciation for college and technical training, leading many of them to pursue higher education (Rose et al., 2016). Finally, Rose et al. (2016) explain that FFA provides pathways for students to reach their full potential, or self-actualization. More than 80% of the survey students developed a stronger desire to set and achieve goals, with more than 90% of them reporting growth in self-discipline, perseverance, and learning from failure.

Character Development in School-Based Agricultural Education

Character Education

SBAE has a long tradition of supporting character, community, and service. SBAE and FFA develop responsible, reliable, and community-minded character traits (Strom, 2002). Strom (2002) posits that character development extends beyond the classroom into the community and home, making SBAE a foundational program for shaping student behavior and values.

Berkowitz and Bier (2004) explain that to effectively implement character education, one must understand the term "character." Character is the "set of psychological characteristics that enable an individual to act as a moral agent" (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004, p. 2). They further

explain that character encompasses moral action, moral values, moral personality, moral emotions, moral reasoning, moral identity, and foundational characteristics, generally referred to as “moral anatomy” (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004), p. 73). An individual’s moral functions may be partly due to any of these psychological characteristics (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004).

The United States Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools (n.d.) defines character education as the shared responsibility of parents, schools, and communities to support positive character development. They further explain that character education teaches “habits of thought and deed that help people live and work together as families, friends, neighbors, communities and nations” (Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools, n.d., para. 3). Strom (2002) adds that character education promotes academic success, interpersonal relationships, and responsible citizenship.

Berkowitz and Bier (2004) argue that character education is effective, but complex and depends on several factors. Effective character education has been shown to improve attendance and academic achievement and reduce discipline referrals, pregnancy, suspensions, school anxiety, and substance use (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). Effective character education relies on teacher buy-in and consistent implementation, however; many teachers are not adequately trained to implement it accurately or completely (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). It has been found that parents and school are the two main predictors of reduced risk behavior in high school students (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). Students bond to schools that promote positive classroom management, tolerant disciplinary practices, extracurricular activities, smaller enrollment sizes, and good physical health (Bonny et al., 2000).

Positive Youth Development

Schools play a critical role in intellectual and social and emotional youth development by providing opportunities through extracurricular activities and specialized courses. Schools facilitate programs and services like social and emotional learning, food distributions, and after-school programming.

Positive youth development programs support young people by promoting bonding, resilience, social, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and moral competence (Catalano et al., 2004). They also foster self-determination, spirituality, self-efficacy, a clear identity, and belief in the future and recognize positive behavior, provide opportunities for prosocial involvement, and encourage prosocial norms (Catalano et al., 2004). Lerner (2009) explains that positive youth development competence, confidence, connection, character, and compassion, also referred to as the 5 Cs of positive youth development. These five components support effective action in various environments, self-belief and goal achievement, support from others, morality and respect, and empathy and caring actions (Lerner, 2009).

Hughes et al. (2025) outline several inhibiting factors in the implementation of positive youth development, including a lack of understanding and acceptance of others, challenging home life, and pressure to perform academically. Conversely, the strengthening factors were diverse opportunities for student engagement, hands-on and engaging courses, and adult intentionality, modeling, and encouragement (Hughes et al., 2025). Hughes et al. (2025) and Strom (2002) further explain strategies for promoting character education through positive youth development. Strom (2002) posits that character development partly depends on a community's commitment. Strom (2002) said school and community leaders must support student programs

and celebrate their success, adding that students who are a part of a supportive environment will learn to transfer the skills and habits of good character.

Because communities and schools need to collaborate to provide effective character education, Hughes et al. (2025) explain that integrating community service through service-learning is a critical element of ethical character development. Additionally, character development can be attributed to positive role models, where adults model good character and compassion (Hughes et al., 2025). Specifically, encouraging words and providing opportunities were found to be effective adult modeling strategies that develop youth character. Further, student voice, intra- and extra-curricular activities, experiential learning, and recognizing and rewarding students have been found to be effective practices for character development (Hughes et al., 2025; Strom, 2002).

In conclusion, schools and communities play a critical role in fostering positive youth development programs, services, and opportunities for students to develop character growth. Research highlights the importance of promoting the 5 Cs – competence, confidence, connection, character, and compassion while addressing barriers to effective implementation (Lerner, 2009). Integrating service-learning, positive adult modeling, and diverse engagement opportunities allows educators and communities to promote ethical character development (Lerner, 2009; Taylor et al., 2017).

Kansas Social, Emotional, and Character Development Standards

Kansas Social, Emotional, and Character Development Policy

In 2012, Kansas adopted the Social, Emotional, and Character Development (SECD) Model Standards to address the need for students to acquire, practice, and exemplify habits that contribute to their academic, career, and personal success (KSDE, 2018). The Kansas SECD

standards are drawn from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) research, which offers a structured foundation for schools to integrate social, emotional, and character education (KSDE, 2018). Notably, the SECD standards have become integral to the Kansas Education Systems Accreditation and Kansas School Redesign, prompting schools to explore methods for assessing social and emotional growth (KSDE, 2021a).

CASEL was established to provide evidence-based social and emotional learning as an essential part of preschool through high school education (CASEL, n.d.). The CASEL framework addresses five broad and interrelated areas of competence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, n.d.). Schools use the CASEL framework to foster social and emotional knowledge, skills, and attitudes (CASEL, n.d.). The five competencies are outlined below (Table 2.1):

Table 2.1
Five Competencies of the CASEL Framework (CASEL, n.d.)

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

The Importance of Social, Emotional, and Character Development Standards

“What if education fully supported the social, emotional, and academic development of all children?” (CASEL, n.d., para. 1). CASEL (n.d.) credits this idea from 1994 as the genesis of social and emotional learning. CASEL (n.d.) believes that every student should have the skills,

relationships, and environments to thrive regardless of background. They further posit that all children deserve to be educated in a supportive, culturally responsive environment that focuses on building relationships and community (CASEL, n.d.).

Coupled with character development, social and emotional learning allows students to learn, practice, and model personal life habits that contribute to their academic, career, and personal success (KSDE, n.d.). The standards are designed to help students practice good citizenship, make healthy decisions, and practice personal safety (KSDE, 2018). The standards also help students understand risk prevention, promote a positive school culture, practice effective problem-solving, and value excellence (KSDE, 2018).

Kansas established the SECD standards with three broad purposes in mind: students' character, personal, and social development. In promoting character development, schools prepare students for American citizenship and participants in an interdependent world (KSDE, 2018). Students' academic and personal success is "built upon their ability to make responsible decisions, solve problems effectively, and identify and demonstrate core principles" (KSDE, 2018, p. 4). To foster personal development, students are encouraged to consider thoughts, understand feelings, and manage their own responses to build upon their success (KSDE, 2018). These attributes impact students' management of their experiences and determine their behavior outcomes. Building and maintaining positive relationships and communicating with others is central to students' social development (KSDE, 2018). Students who can recognize the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others are poised to practice effective cooperation, communication, and conflict resolution (KSDE, 2018).

Objectives and Purposes of Kansas SECD Standards

Kansas Social, Emotional, and Character Development standards provide schools a framework for integrating social and emotional learning (KSDE, 2018). The core beliefs of the standards are that they provide skills that are teachable and measurable, essential for academic achievement, developed within continuous growth processes throughout life, acquired by students through intentional, integrated efforts of the entire school, family, and community, and best learned in a respectful, safe, and civil school environment where adults are caring role models (KSDE, 2018).

In addition to those core beliefs, the Kansas SECD standards prepare students for postsecondary success. These postsecondary success goals suggest that students who meet the SECD standards will demonstrate strong character by treating others with respect and kindness, taking responsibility for their thoughts and actions, maintaining a growth mindset, and developing the skills to work both independently and collaboratively (KSDE, 2018). Students who are postsecondary-ready also strive for excellence through hard work, persistence, and intrinsic motivation; exhibit creativity and innovation, critical thinking, and effective problem-solving; use resources effectively and appropriately, demonstrate an understanding of other perspectives and cultures; show empathy for others' feelings and beliefs; and model responsibility of citizenship and exhibit respect for human dignity (KSDE, 2018).

Theory-in-Action of Kansas SECD Standards

The Kansas SECD standards are organized into competencies, which students achieve through a competency-based model (KSDE, 2021a). The broad competencies include groups of related standards that can be achieved between subject areas (KSDE, 2021a). Because the competencies are not focused on singular skills, students can demonstrate their learning in unique ways that are meaningful to them (KSDE, 2021a). Further, this competency-based model

is aligned with students' individual plans of study, allowing them to move through the curriculum at their own pace (KSDE, 2021a).

Social and emotional growth (SEG) results from the SECD standards and social and emotional learning delivered in a healthy climate (KSDE, 2021b). It is also the result of proactive teaching and learning of social and emotional skills and competencies, a supportive culture and climate, and a clear improvement cycle used by schools (KSDE, 2021b). It is embedded in the Kansas Education System Accreditation (KESA) and Kansas School Redesign (KSDE, 2021b). The SEG assessment allows districts to screen for mental and behavioral health needs. Districts have autonomy over measuring SEG locally and should relate to each district's needs and level of readiness (KSDE, 2021b). Some schools may purchase an online assessment system and use that system's professional development (KSDE, 2021b).

To help Kansas schools determine how they will assess SEG, they can adopt a strengths-based approach to assessing social and emotional learning. This approach focuses on the knowledge and use of skills and competencies that are taught and supported (KSDE, 2021b). There are three strategy implementation categories that schools may find themselves in - No or Low Implementation, Initial Implementation, or Robust Implementation (KSDE, 2021). Again, schools have autonomy in implementing and assessing SEG; thus, it is a school's decision on how quickly they progress to the next level (KSDE, 2021).

To demonstrate how a school with mature readiness or robust implementation navigates SEG, we can examine its strength-based skill assessment, culture and climate measures, and improvement cycle data. These schools may use quarterly validated skills assessments and a full assessment for students who do not meet benchmarks (KSDE, 2021b). Student surveys, attendance, discipline, grades, and staff social and emotional growth are used to measure their

culture and climate (KSDE, 2021b). Finally, these schools implement a universal risk screener, monitor progress through interventions, and use evidence-based supports and skill-focused interventions (KSDE, 2021b).

Social and Political Context of Kansas SECD Standards

In Kansas, the SECD standards are not directly tied to legislation. Federally, language supporting social and emotional learning can be seen in the American Rescue Plan (ARP) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The American Rescue Plan of 2021 invested \$122 billion in K-12 education to help districts reopen schools and address “students’ academic, social, and emotional learning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic” (CASEL, 2023, p. 1). The ARP required districts to spend 20 percent of their funds to address learning loss through evidence-based interventions in response to students' academic, social, and emotional needs (CASEL, 2023).

Although ESSA does not explicitly mention social and emotional learning, it provides both direct and indirect opportunities to support the development of these skills. Researchers found three possible funding avenues from ESSA that support SEL through Title I (focus on improving achievements of disadvantaged students), Title II (preparing and training high-quality educators), and Title IV (21st Century Schools that support educational opportunities and disadvantaged students) (Grant et al., 2017). SEL interventions in ESSA support interpersonal skills that promote peer interactions, community involvement, school culture, and academic achievement (Grant et al., 2017).

While the Kansas SECD standards have stayed out of the spotlight, social and emotional learning (SEL) has recently made headlines nationwide. Some worry that its focus takes time away from academic learning or even promotes controversial ideals that are not in line with one's

values (Tyner, 2021). States like North Dakota, Oklahoma, Maine, Iowa, Montana, and New Hampshire have seen proposed legislation that would ban social and emotional learning in schools (Abrams, 2023; Sexton, 2024; Stanford & Meisner, 2023). Following a lawsuit that claimed a Pennsylvania district was “illegally subjecting children to radical and invasive” SEL materials, children in that district can now opt out of the SEL curriculum (Richardson, 2023, para. 2). Despite the attempts, no states have banned social and emotional learning (Stanford & Prothero, 2023).

Effectiveness of Addressing the Issue

Schools implementing systematic, evidence-based social and emotional learning or character education observe academic improvements, including higher test scores, graduation rates, and higher post-secondary enrollment (Akers, 2004; Durlak, 2011; Goss & Holt, 2014; Mahoney et al., 2021; Porter et al., 2023). Moreover, prioritizing social, emotional and character development contributes to a decline in violence, bullying, and student drop-out rates, underscoring the comprehensive benefits of this educational approach (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). Evidence-based SEL programs have been rigorously evaluated, and results are likely to occur (Mahoney et al., 2021). Such programming often entails a “comprehensive curriculum focused on creating relationally healthy places for children and adults” (Mahoney et al., 2021, p. 1134). Social and emotional curriculum can be incorporated in the school setting in various ways. Free-standing lessons can be taught to explicitly enhance students’ SEL competence, either in an academic course such as math or English or during an Advisory or Homeroom period (Mahoney et al., 2021). SEL can also be taught through instructional strategies and supportive and culturally responsive learning environments focusing on community building (Mahoney et al., 2021).

Research supports that school culture, policies, and norms impact multiple dimensions of high school students' growth (Porter et al., 2023). Schools that prioritize social and emotional skills play a vital role in fostering better connections and nurturing higher-quality relationships among students (Akers, 2004; Porter et al., 2023). Further, students feel a stronger sense of belonging in their schools and put forth more hard work and effort (Porter et al., 2023). This emphasis on socio-emotional growth supports academic achievement and contributes to a healthier and more inclusive school environment, recognizing the significance of holistic student well-being.

Conclusions and Implications

The Kansas Social, Emotional, and Character Development standards and social and emotional learning offer insights and implications for educational policy and practice in Kansas, from student mental health and academic and personal success to career readiness. The standards, grounded in CASEL's social and emotional learning framework, demonstrate the effectiveness in fostering and promoting essential competencies such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. By integrating these competencies into the existing academic curriculum, students are equipped with interpersonal and intrapersonal skills to enhance their academic and personal success.

Despite federal policies like the American Rescue Plan and Every Student Succeeds Act providing crucial funding and direct and indirect support, SEL programs face political and ideological resistance in many districts and states. Regardless of the challenges, evidence-based SEL programs positively impact academic performance, school climate, and student well-being.

The literature surrounding mental health, emotional intelligence, social and emotional learning, character development, and the Kansas state social, emotional, and character

development standards underscores the importance of holistic student development and success. While research connecting these areas to SBAE is limited, the broader literature on social, emotional, and character development aligns with the agricultural education three component model. The classroom and laboratory component of the model provides a structured environment for integration of problem-solving, collaboration, and discussion that promotes social, emotional, and character skills. Similarly, student leadership opportunities in FFA cultivate social awareness, interpersonal skills, and civic responsibility through various activities. Finally, Supervised Agricultural Experiences (SAE) offers students opportunities for experiential learning, which fosters responsibility and self-management. The foundational principles and practices within SBAE naturally lend themselves to the development of socially, emotionally, and ethically competent individuals.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Research Design

This descriptive collective case study examined the perceptions of Kansas SBAE teachers regarding the practices in SBAE that promote social, emotional, and character development skills. Case studies investigate contemporary phenomena and real-world contexts (Yin, 2017). Collective case studies, or multiple case studies, have one issue or concern: the researcher selects several programs from several research sites or multiple programs in a single site to study (Baxter, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This method was used to understand and explain the perceived practices of Kansas SBAE teachers that promote SECD skills by conducting case study interviews with Kansas SBAE teachers. The collective case study uses the logic of replication, allowing the researcher to replicate the procedures for each case (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2017). To best generalize a collective case study, the researcher selects representative cases to include (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2017).

Case study interviews were conducted with Kansas SBAE teachers who were purposefully selected to provide diverse perspectives on SECD practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I utilized semi-structured interviews to allow participants to share their experiences, instructional strategies, and challenges in implementing SECD within their agricultural education programs (Merriam, 2009). The case study questions focused on how teachers integrated SECD skills into their curriculum, the role of FFA and SAE in fostering these skills, and any barriers they encountered. These interviews provided rich, qualitative data that helped identify common themes across different SBAE programs.

To increase the credibility of my research, I conducted a document analysis to review and evaluate documents related to my research. Document analysis, combined with other qualitative research, serves as a method of triangulation (Bowen, 2009). Bowen (2009) explains that document analysis helps a researcher understand a case deeply. The document analysis was completed after the interviews. Interview participants submitted documents and images that they believe support social, emotional, and character development. Using my research objectives and conceptual framework to guide me, I analyzed these documents to deduce how SBAE teachers implemented and fostered social, emotional, and character development.

Research Objectives

This case study explored how Kansas SBAE teachers understand and implement social, emotional, and character development in their teaching. Given the attention surrounding social and emotional learning and SECD and its role in supporting student well-being, academic success, and post-secondary readiness (Mahoney et al., 2021; Strom, 2002), it is essential to understand how teachers perceive its importance and how they integrate it in their teaching practices. To achieve this, the study focused on two main objectives:

1. Determine teachers' perceptions of their role in social, emotional, and character development.
2. Examine the strategies and practices teachers use to integrate social, emotional, and character development in their programs.

Researcher Subjectivity

It is important to address my subjectivity in this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Practicing reflexivity in my qualitative research is vital to understanding how my background and past experiences inform how I interpret my study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After graduating

from K-State in 2009 with my agricultural education degree, I taught SBAE in Kansas for 13 years and currently serve as a graduate teaching assistant in agricultural education where I work with pre-service teachers. I recognize the deep connections that SBAE teachers have with their students in and out of the classroom and the impact that SBAE teachers make on their students' choices.

My interest in social, emotional, and character development stems from teaching students who faced mental health challenges, behavioral issues, and personal hardships. Through these experiences, I came to recognize the value and impact social and emotional learning has on fostering a supportive learning environment. I recognize the value of fostering a positive learning environment by incorporating social, emotional, and character development formally and informally.

This topic has become particularly important to me as I have lost several former students to suicide. These tragic losses reinforced my belief that teachers play a crucial role in supporting students' social development and mental well-being. Agricultural education teachers are mentors and role models but often do not receive the training and resources they need to navigate students' emotional challenges. My experiences have emphasized my commitment to understanding how SBAE teachers perceive and implement social, emotional, and character development in their programs.

By addressing my subjectivity in this study, I aim to be both informed and analytical, ensuring the findings contribute to the conversation of social, emotional, and character development in SBAE.

Epistemological Perspective

The epistemological social constructivism interpretive framework can further explain the approach of this case study. Social constructivist researchers seek an understanding of the world by interpreting participants' views of a situation (Baxter, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Bhattacharya (2017) explains that a constructivist explores how participants shape meanings and actions from their experiences. Further, in epistemological research, the researcher gets as close to the experience as possible (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Social constructivism holds that no single observable reality exists, but multiple interpretations are left for a researcher to construct (Merriam, 2009). This interpretive framework was relevant in this study as I uncovered how SBAE teachers foster and promote social, emotional, and character development.

My research did not aim to uncover a singular truth but to collaboratively shape the understanding of social, emotional, and character development within Kansas SBAE programs (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Crotty, 1998). Adopting a social constructivist perspective enabled me to explore teachers' individual experiences with social, emotional, and character development through SBAE. As Crotty (1998) suggests, reality is socially constructed. Moreover, "social" refers to constructing meaning rather than the meaning of an object, meaning it refers to the process of individuals and groups constructing understanding together (Crotty, 1998). I combined the responses from SBAE teachers to gain insight into how they nurture these skills.

Through this lens, I investigated how teachers promote social, emotional, and character development in their programs. Through the case study, I acknowledged the subjectivity of teachers' experiences and considered how they perceive social, emotional, and character development, which allowed me to gain insights into how they support students' social, emotional, and character development needs.

Conceptual Framework

In 2012, Kansas adopted the Social, Emotional, and Character Development (SECD) Model Standards to address the need for students to acquire, practice, and exemplify habits that contribute to their academic, career, and personal success (KSDE, 2018). These standards are drawn from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) research, offering a structured foundation for schools to integrate social, emotional, and character education (KSDE, 2018). Notably, the SECD standards have become integral to the Kansas Education Systems Accreditation and Kansas School Redesign, prompting schools to explore methods for assessing social and emotional growth (KSDE, 2021).

The CASEL framework served as this qualitative study's conceptual framework or specific concepts, policies, and models (Mathipia & Gumbo, 2015). CASEL was established to provide evidence-based social and emotional learning as an essential part of preschool through high school education (CASEL, n.d.). The CASEL framework addresses five broad and interrelated areas of competence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, n.d.). Schools use the CASEL framework to foster social and emotional knowledge, skills, and attitudes (CASEL, n.d.).

The CASEL framework is particularly relevant to this study as it provides a structured lens for examining how SBAE teachers implement SECD. By analyzing teachers' perceptions and practices through the five CASEL competencies, this study explores how SECD is fostered within SBAE programs and its role in preparing students for academic, career, and personal success.

Specifically, the CASEL instrument, *School-Based Staff Survey on Schoolwide SEL Implementation* (CASEL 2021), served as a framework for developing the case study interview

protocol. The survey is a validated tool used by schools to assess their staff and teachers' perceptions of social and emotional learning practices and the extent to which they believe it is embedded in the school culture and practices. Tailoring the *CASEL School-Based Staff Survey on Schoolwide SEL Implementation* (CASEL, 2021) to understand the perceptions and practices used by SBAE teachers ensured the research was grounded in a nationally recognized framework.

Additionally, the five CASEL competencies align closely with SBAE's three-circle model of classroom instruction, FFA, and SAE, demonstrating how agricultural education provides an ideal environment for SECD development. This study examines how Kansas SBAE teachers integrate these competencies into their programs and identifies the perceived impact on students' social, emotional, and character growth.

Prior research highlights the growing importance of SECD in SBAE, particularly in fostering workplace readiness skills such as communication, teamwork, and ethical decision-making (Yoder et al., 2020; Yopp et al., 2017). By situating this study within the CASEL framework, this research builds on existing literature and provides insight into how SBAE teachers integrate SECD practices in their classrooms, leadership programs, and experiential learning opportunities.

While the conceptual framework for this study was guided by the Kansas SECD standards and the CASEL framework, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) offers an additional theoretical lens to understand the foundational human motivations that may support SECD. Maslow's (1943) theory highlights the progression of human needs from physiological and safety needs to belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. This hierarchy provides context for understanding how SECD frameworks, as implemented in SBAE programs, address students'

needs for connection, confidence, and self-fulfillment. In this way, Maslow's theory supports the rationale for embedding SECD into education by linking it to the psychological conditions necessary for student growth and lifelong success.

Rigor and Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is essential to ensure the validity and reliability of findings. Trustworthiness is established through four key criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These components enhance research rigor, ensuring that the findings accurately represent the phenomenon and individuals being studied. Additionally, reliability, replicability, consistency, and accuracy contribute to the credibility of qualitative research (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017).

Credibility, or the believability of results, is strengthened through multiple strategies, including triangulation, prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, and member-checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Triangulation, the use of multiple sources of data, is a fundamental approach to ensuring research validity (Patton, 2002; Williams, 2018). In this study, data source triangulation was employed by corroborating interviewee responses, assessing their consistency over time (Patton, 2002), and analyzing multiple data sources, including interviews with Kansas SBAE teachers and supporting educational documents (Bowen, 2009; Tracy, 2010). Member-checking further ensured credibility by allowing participants to verify the accuracy of their responses, preventing misinterpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Transferability refers to the extent to which findings can be applied to other contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This is achieved through thick, rich descriptions, providing sufficient detail for readers to understand the study's context and determine the applicability of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Williams, 2018). Maintaining detailed field notes throughout the

research process strengthens transferability by ensuring transparency from data collection to analysis and reporting.

Dependability ensures that research findings are consistent and replicable (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study established dependability by adhering to semi-structured interview and document analysis protocols and maintaining detailed records of data collection (Forero, 2018). Additionally, dependability was reinforced through strategies that support credibility, such as triangulation and reflexive journaling.

Finally, confirmability ensures that the research findings are objective and not unduly influenced by researcher bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This was achieved through peer reviews, bracketing, and saturation. Peer reviews involved external researchers assessing the validity of findings, while bracketing allowed the researcher to acknowledge and account for their personal experiences and potential biases (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

By employing these rigorous qualitative research strategies, I ensured that the findings were credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable, ultimately contributing to a trustworthy representation of social, emotional, and character development in Kansas SBAE.

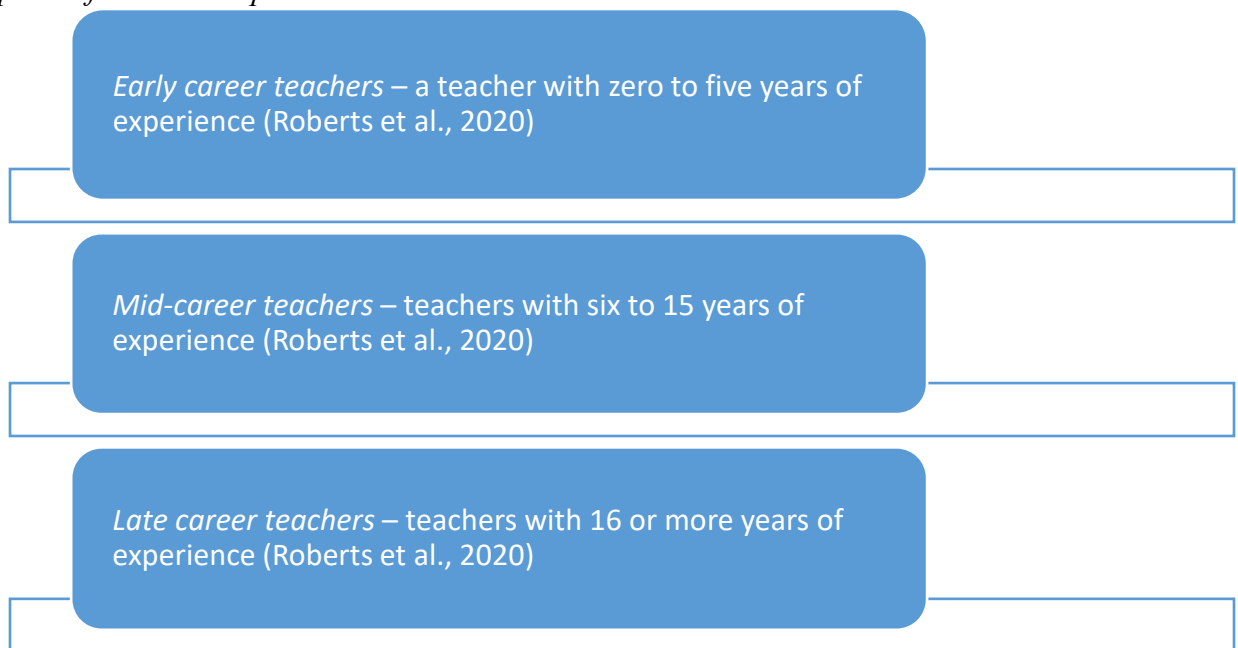
Participant Selection

Initial Teacher Selection Survey

To create a bounded case study, I first needed to identify teachers for interviews. I developed a survey for Kansas SBAE teachers to gather information on their gender identity, teaching experience, experience with explicit social and emotional learning curricula, school size, and certification type. My goal was to recruit a diverse group of current Kansas SBAE teachers, representing multiple genders, various levels of teaching experience, and different school sizes. Using purposive sampling, I aimed to capture multiple perspectives on social,

emotional, and character development by intentionally selecting participants with varying backgrounds and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Figure 3.2 summarizes Roberts et al (2020) descriptions of teacher experience.

Figure 3.1
Description of Teacher Experience



Case Selection for Qualitative Case Study

Using case study purposive sampling (Creswell and Poth, 2018), I selected individuals from the survey respondents who indicated they were willing to participate in follow-up interviews. To capture responses from a diverse set of teachers, I selected five varying criteria from which to invite individuals to interview. The criteria include years of experience, gender identity, school size, teacher certification type, and school-mandated social and emotional learning. Years of experience were classified as early career (1-5 years of experience), mid-career (6-15 years of experience), and late career (16+ years of experience). These ranges were based on the classifications set by Roberts et al. (2020). Teachers indicated the size of the school

in which they teach. In Kansas, schools are classified as 1A, 2A, 3A, 4A, 5A, and 6A (KSHSAA, 2024). The smallest classification, 1A, are schools with a high school enrollment range of 15-108 students in grades 9-12, while 6A schools have a total high school enrollment range of 1,410-2,544 (KSHSAA, 2024).

I also selected for varying teacher certification type. The Kansas Department of Education (2023) defines traditional certification as those who obtained their teaching license by graduating with a degree in agricultural education, while alternatively licensed teachers were certified through transition-to-teach programs or were previously certified in another academic field. Other licensures include Career and Technical specialized certificates, restricted technical certificates, and emergency substitutes (KSDE, 2023).

To further diversify the pool, I selected teachers who do and do not teach specific social and emotional learning lessons. In the pool of respondents willing to be interviewed, six indicated they were not mandated to teach social and emotional learning lessons, while 29 were. Of those 29, 25 taught pre-made lessons from a program their school purchased or implemented by the school, while four teachers taught a combination of lessons they created and found.

I removed non-licensed teachers from the pool of respondents willing to be interviewed. Non-licensed teachers are those with an emergency substitute license or did not indicate their type of licensure. Removing non-licensed teachers helped me clarify the scope and ensure the results applied to the majority of agricultural educators in Kansas. I also removed first-year teachers. First-year teachers have limited experience, and their perspectives may be less developed compared to more experienced teachers who can offer deeper insights. Additionally, teachers in their first year face significant stress as they learn to balance teaching and advising

responsibilities (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). Ethically, I did not want to burden them further and add additional stress by scheduling interviews.

I ultimately selected nine teachers to invite for case study interviews. I selected teachers from each category of years of experience (early, mid, and late) based on the school size (small, medium, and large). I further diversified the sample by selecting individuals of different gender identities, including males (3) and females (6), and different certification types, with seven being traditionally certified and two being alternatively certified. Finally, I selected teachers mandated to teach SEL lessons (7) and those not (2). Due to scheduling conflicts and non-responses, I only interviewed six of the selected teachers.

A descriptive case study approach was used for this research study. A case study is used when a researcher seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of a case by exploring an issue or a problem (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The bounded system in this case study was six Kansas SBAE teachers. Using a descriptive case study to interview current SBAE teachers was justified as it explained their perceived practices in fostering social, emotional, and character development in their classrooms and FFA programs (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, document analysis related to classroom management and teaching strategies was conducted in this case study. The documents included lesson plans, syllabi, classroom rules and policies, and classroom set-up.

Description of the Case

The study sought to explain the perceived practices of current SBAE teachers in fostering social, emotional, and character development in their classrooms and FFA programs. The participants ($n=6$) were current Kansas SBAE teachers. Unique purposeful sampling was used to select the participants in the case (Merriam, 2009). Participants were selected based on their

years of teaching experience, school size, gender identity, and whether they were mandated to teach explicit SEL lessons.

A qualitative case study allowed for an in-depth exploration of the perceptions and practices of current Kansas SBAE teachers regarding social, emotional, and character development. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted via Zoom and document analysis. The study aimed to explore the strategies used by participants and the challenges they encounter in fostering social, emotional, and character development beyond agricultural content. Data were analyzed using axial coding to identify patterns and themes across the participants' experiences.

Data Collection

Institutional Review Board

My research survey and case study were approved by the Kansas State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) regarding human subjects' research in the Fall of 2024. I completed all appropriate Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative modules before submitting the IRB application. I included all variables to be studied, data collection methods, risk-protection strategies, benefits to the subjects, methods for confidentiality, and informed consent information in the IRB application. The initial IRB was approved on November 4, 2024. An amendment was submitted and approved by the IRB to collect documents from participants in my case study to analyze for triangulation. Full approval for IRB-12447 was granted on December 19, 2024.

Survey

A quantitative survey was created to recruit Kansas SBAE teachers to participate in the qualitative case study. The survey, which is adapted from the CASEL *School-based Staff Survey*

on *Schoolwide SEL Implementation* (CASEL, 2021), contained 13 questions to gather data about teachers' perceptions and practices surrounding SECD.

Dillman et al. (2014) iterate the importance of testing surveys to ensure they are fully functional. To enhance content validity, I consulted with a team of experts, consisting of my four committee members – three agricultural education faculty and one counseling faculty. These experts reviewed the survey questions and format to ensure clarity, reliability, and alignment with the study's objectives. Their feedback helped refine wording, structure, and presentation to enhance respondent engagement and improve the survey's effectiveness in collecting meaningful data (Dillman et al., 2014).

I piloted the survey by distributing to Nebraska SBAE teachers in September. I analyzed the results and adjusted them where necessary. Validity and reliability were established for the *School-based Staff Survey on Schoolwide SEL* using differentiated item functioning (CASEL, 2021). The survey had strong reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha > .80$) with sufficient unidimensionality (IRT; explained variance $> 40\%$; unexplained variance $< 10\%$) (CASEL, 2022).

Survey questions specifically addressing social, emotional, and character development in SBAE support the five areas of competence of the CASEL framework: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020). Sections of the survey that address teacher challenges in integrating SECD support previous research around teacher barriers (Martinez, 2016).

Following the pilot survey, I adjusted the size of schools to the Kansas State High School Activities Association sizes of 1A-6A classifications to better understand the type of schools teachers work in. Given the overall reliability of the survey, however, no adjustments were made to the questions regarding SECD.

In November 2024, I distributed the survey to Kansas SBAE teachers to explore their perceptions and experiences in teaching and fostering interpersonal and intrapersonal skills in students. I obtained a list of current agricultural education teachers in Kansas ($N = 295$) from the Kansas FFA Executive Secretary and transferred the email addresses into Qualtrics for efficient distribution and tracking of survey completion. Eighteen email addresses were unusable, reducing the sample size to 277. Of those invited, 100 teachers completed the survey, resulting in a 36% response rate. While the collected data will be analyzed for future research posters and publications, it was not quantitatively analyzed for my dissertation. At the end of the survey, teachers had the option to participate in a qualitative interview. From those who opted in, I selected participants for my case study.

Case Study Participant Selection

To select participants for my case study, I analyzed and organized the survey respondents by gender identity, years of experience, certification type, size of school, and whether they teach specific social and emotional learning lessons. A total of 34 survey respondents indicated their willingness to participate in the follow-up case study interviews via Zoom.

First, I organized the willing respondents by school size. Small Schools (1A and 2A) had 17 willing respondents, Medium Schools (3A and 4A) had 12 willing respondents, and Large Schools (5A and 6A) had five willing respondents. Next, I organized teachers in each school size category by years of experience, with novice teachers having 1-5 years of experience, Mid teachers having 6-15 years of experience, and Late teachers with 16 or more years of experience. I organized the school size and years of experience into three separate tables by school size with three columns each for years of experience. Next to each respondent's name, I indicated their

gender identity, type of certification, and if they teach social and emotional lessons based on their responses.

After discussion with my committee, I excluded teachers with less than one year of experience, as I felt they had not yet developed the expertise needed to effectively promote social, emotional, and character development. I also excluded one individual who was an emergency substitute, as they were not fully licensed to teach agricultural education. After refining my pool of case study participants, I was left with 29 viable candidates.

After evaluating, arranging, and enhancing my potential case study participants, I chose a diverse group to represent each category. For areas that had more than one participant that shared similar characteristics, I randomly selected a name to interview by writing participants' name on a piece of paper and drawing from a hat. I selected one participant from each school size and level of teaching experience. From there, I tried to diversify the interviewees by gender identity, certification type, and those who do or do not teach SEL lessons.

The case study participants I selected included a diverse range of teachers based on experience, certification type, school size, and their involvement in teaching social, emotional, and character development (SEL). The selected respondents were:

- A novice traditionally certified male teacher in a small school who teaches SEL.
- A mid-career, alternatively certified female teacher in a small school who does not teach SEL.
- A late career, traditionally certified female teacher in a small school who teaches SEL.
- A novice certified male teacher in a medium-sized school who teaches SEL.
- A mid-career, traditionally certified female teacher in a medium-sized school who does not teach SEL.

- A late career, traditionally certified male teacher in a medium-sized school who teaches SEL.
- A novice certified female teacher in a large school who teaches SEL.
- A mid-career, alternatively certified female teacher in a large school who teaches SEL.
- A late career, traditionally certified female teacher in a large school who teaches SEL.

I emailed each selected teacher to inform them of their selection and invited them to participate in an interview. Those who were interested were provided with a Doodle poll to select an available date and time for a Zoom interview. For those who scheduled an interview, I followed up with a Zoom invitation.

Of the nine invitees, seven initially responded and scheduled an interview. One participant had to reschedule due to illness and ultimately canceled. In the end, I interviewed six teachers representing a range of school sizes, experience levels, SEL teaching experience, and genders. Unfortunately, I was unable to interview any alternatively certified teachers due to non-responses from participants.

Case Study Interviews

The interview consisted of 13 semi-structured questions. Semi-structured questions allowed me to respond to new ideas on the topic (Merriam, 2009). The questions were adapted from the *Teacher Self-Assessment: SEL in the Classroom* (CASEL, 2019), a tool used to assist teachers in tracking and reflecting the use of integration SEL strategies in the classroom. The interview questions were divided into two sections: interpersonal skills (six questions) and intrapersonal skills (seven questions). Questions were structured to allow participants to reflect on their teaching practices and student interactions. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and one hour. This study should not be generalized beyond the population of Kansas SBAE

teachers who participated; however, the findings can provide insight for SBAE teachers, agricultural teacher educators, and school personnel interested in SEL and character education practices.

Document Analysis

When conducting document analysis, researchers can establish authenticity by selecting a data source relevant to a research question (Merriam, 2009). Following the interviews, I collected supporting documents from participants to further analyze how they support and promote social, emotional, and character development. Participants were asked to submit at least two documents and two photos of their choosing to a Qualtrics form. I requested photos of their teaching space, such as classrooms, labs, or areas highlighting SECD practices (e.g., teamwork displays, calming corners, or leadership tools) and documents such as lesson plans, activities, or resources, that demonstrate how they incorporate SECD into their teaching. The images and documents had all identifiable details removed to ensure participants' privacy and confidentiality.

In total, I analyzed 20 documents and 12 photos submitted by five of the participants for effective communication strategies, teaching methods, policies, and signs of a positive classroom climate that supports social, emotional, and character development. Supporting characteristics in the documents were compared to the five core competencies of the CASEL framework and recorded on a three-column observation protocol.

Emerging codes were recorded in the observation protocol (Merriam, 2009). Emerging codes from the document analysis were merged with the interview themes. To ensure qualitative rigor, triangulation methods were used based on the recommendations of Patton (2002) and

Williams (2018). I triangulated the data by corroborating interview respondents' reports and checking for consistency of interview respondents' responses over time (Patton, 2002).

Data Analysis

Data analysis allows for deep insights reflecting the researcher's conceptual and analytical frameworks, understanding of literature, and research purpose to develop the findings (Bhattacharya, 2017). Creswell and Poth (2018) summarize data analysis into four main processes: preliminary read-through, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming interpretations. Initial, inductive data analysis occurred concurrently with the case study interviews (Bhattacharya, 2017; Rabiee, 2004). With inductive analysis, a researcher begins the process without a testable hypothesis about the data (Bhattacharya, 2017). Further, Saldaña (2021) explains that coding is one way to analyze qualitative data. Saldaña (2021) describes data analysis or coding as an interpretive act in which a researcher summarizes, distills, and condenses data.

Data Management Processes

After the case study interviews, I recorded my initial thoughts on reflective journals in Microsoft Word. My reflections on the focus group responses and recorded non-verbal communication aided data analysis (Rabiee, 2004). The audio files from the interviews were saved on a password-protected university computer with cloud-based storage for backup. The audio files of the interviews were transcribed verbatim using Zoom transcription. I listened to the audio file to familiarize myself with the data, compared it to the transcription from Zoom, and corrected any mistakes in the transcription. I assigned pseudonyms to the participants to protect their identities and created a Microsoft Excel document to summarize their name, pseudonym, gender identity, and description of their SBAE experience.

First-Cycle Coding

Qualitative data analysis is a cyclical process (Saldaña, 2021). I applied Saldaña's (2021) principles of initial coding to this study to uncover tentative and provisional codes. I analyzed the data using the CASEL Social and Emotional Learning framework and the Kansas Social, Emotional, and Character Development standards to consider how various components of social, emotional, and character learning manifested in the case. Throughout the data analysis process, I connected the strategies shared by the participants to the broader objectives of fostering social, emotional, and character development in SBAE programs. I considered how those strategies and practices can support inclusive and positive environments.

For this initial coding, the transcript was read a second time. I used analytic memos throughout the process, which assisted in reflecting the data to identify patterns (Saldaña, 2021). I used a constant comparative method throughout the coding process to compare data to emerging categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This iterative approach ensured thorough exploration and understanding of the qualitative data, contributing to the depth and richness of the study's findings.

I utilized the transcripts to capture initial coding and notes (Saldaña, 2021). In the documents, I used in vivo codes directly derived from the data articulated by the interview participants (Saldaña, 2021). In vivo codes were signified by highlighting sections of the transcript that I found remarkable. This allowed me to track codes that were "participant-inspired rather than researcher-generated" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 140). In addition to recording initial codes and notes, I recorded analytic memos (Saldaña, 2021). Analytic memos allowed me to practice reflexivity on the data and prompt critical thinking (Saldaña, 2021). The analytic memos were captured using the "*comment*" feature on Microsoft Word. Using "*comments*," I recorded my

impressions of the responses from the interview participants. These first impressions are known as eclectic codes. Eclectic coding, a form of opening coding, combines two or more first-cycle coding methods and is used in the initial exploratory phase (Saldaña, 2021).

In addition to in vivo and eclectic codes, I utilized descriptive coding and concept coding. I assigned basic labels to the initial in vivo codes using descriptive codes (Saldaña, 2021), which allowed me to inventory the topics that arose in the interviews. Concept coding was the third step in first-cycle coding. I analyzed the descriptive and in vivo codes and extracted big-picture ideas (Saldaña, 2021). The concept codes comprised one- to two-word phrases summarizing the initial findings.

Nonverbal communication was also factored into data analysis. Observing nonverbal cues like body language, speech markers, and paralinguistics greatly enriched conversational data analysis. I recorded this information on the same Microsoft Excel document to enrich and further expand on the responses.

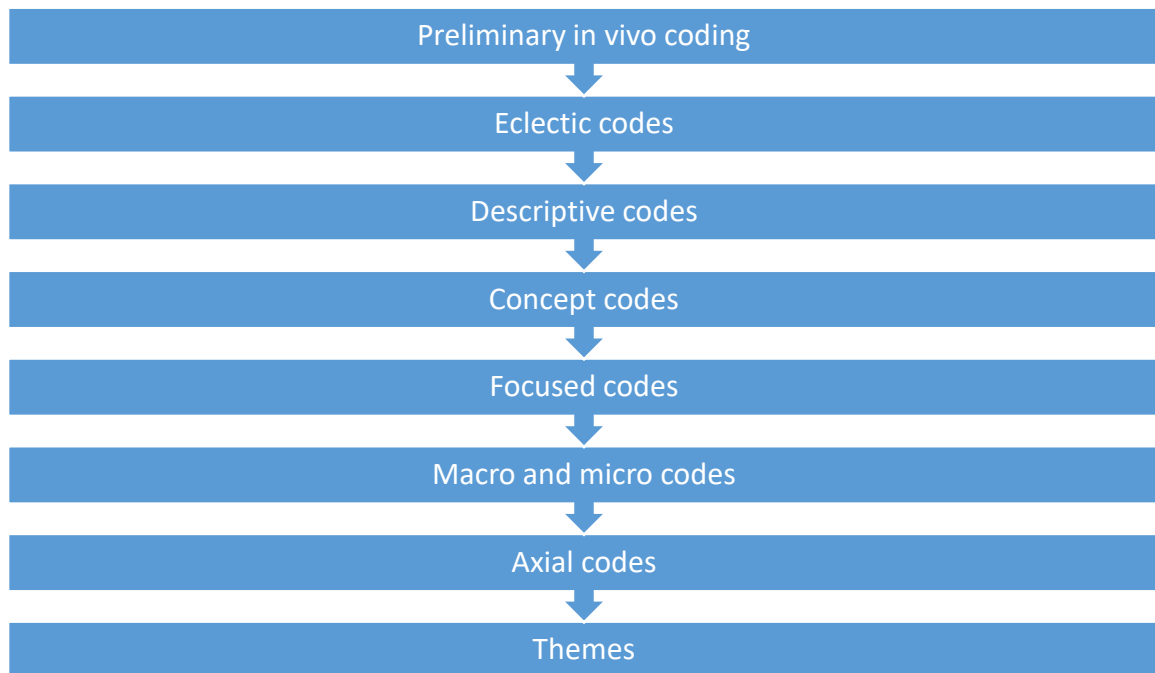
Second-Cycle Coding

I read and reviewed the transcripts a third time for second-cycle coding. I categorized the data with focused coding based on “categorical, thematic, or conceptual similarity” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 301). This further analysis of the codes was applied by identifying similar words, phrases, and teaching practices in the interviews (Lochmiller, 2021). Emergent patterns were aggregated from the codes and synthesized into categories (Lochmiller, 2021) through macro-coding and micro-coding (Saldaña, 2021).

I used Microsoft Excel to organize codes for axial coding. Axial coding, appropriate for research with various data forms, was applied to extend the analytic work from preliminary coding (Saldaña, 2021). Strass & Corbin (1998, p. 124) explain that axial coding aims to

“strategically reassemble data that were split or fractured during initial coding” (as cited in Saldaña, 2021, p. 308). A summary of the coding process used for this case study according to recommendations from Strass & Corbin (1998) is shown in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2
Coding Process Flow Chart (adapted from Saldaña, 2021)



I created columns on the spreadsheet to organize emerging data. The columns included research question number, code, person, and quote. Once the codes were determined to be consistent, I listened to the transcripts and audio files once more to organize them into categories and themes. Additionally, I printed the spreadsheet with the in vivo, descriptive, and concept codes and used a highlighter to group similar codes to aid in identifying categories and themes. Themes are extended phrases with several codes that help identify the data's meaning (Saldaña, 2021).

The data analysis and coding processes used in this study align with the initial research questions by examining how SBAE teachers described their approach to promoting and fostering social, emotional, and character development. Teachers' responses highlighting their understanding of social, emotional, and character development can be identified and categorized through coding. Through data analysis, patterns and themes emerged that allowed me to form an understanding of how teachers define and describe concepts about social, emotional, and character development.

Methodology Summary

This study utilized a descriptive collective case study design to explore Kansas SBAE teachers' perceptions and practices related to SECD. The goal was to understand how SECD is perceived and implemented within the specific context of Kansas SBAE programs. The research was guided by two primary objectives: (1) to determine teachers' perceptions of their role in SECD, and (2) to examine the strategies and practices they use to support students' SECD. Six Kansas SBAE teachers were purposefully selected through a preliminary survey, ensuring diversity in experience, gender identity, school setting, and certification status. Data were collected through semi-structured Zoom interviews and document analysis, including lesson plans, classroom visuals, and rules.

The study was grounded in a social constructivist epistemological framework, emphasizing multiple realities shaped by individual experiences. It also drew upon the Kansas SECD standards and the CASEL framework which emphasizes self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

To ensure rigor and trustworthiness, the study employed triangulation and member-checking, aimed for transferability through thick description, ensured dependability through

structured protocols, and maintained confirmability through peer review and bracketing. Data analysis followed Saldaña's (2021) coding methods, involving both inductive and deductive approaches. Interview transcripts and documents were analyzed using in vivo, descriptive, and concept codes, followed by focused and axial coding to identify patterns and themes aligned with the research questions and conceptual frameworks.

Chapter 4 - Results

The purpose of this case study was to describe the social, emotional, and character development teaching practices of SBAE teachers in Kansas. In this study, social, emotional, and character development is generally defined as practicing good citizenship as respectful, responsible, empathetic, and ethical individuals. The central research question guiding this case study is: *How do Kansas School-Based Agricultural Education (SBAE) teachers perceive they foster social, emotional, and character development in their programs?* To address this question, the study was guided by the following research objectives: (1) to determine teachers' perceptions of their role in social, emotional, and character development, and (2) to examine the strategies and practices teachers use to foster students' social, emotional, and character development within their programs.

Participant Demographics

Describing the characteristics of the teacher participants in the case study was essential to this case study (Table 4.1). Six Kansas SBAE teachers participated in the case study interviews. Four participants were female, and two were male. Two teachers were novices with two to four years of teaching experience, one was a mid-career teacher with five to 15 years of teaching experience, and three were late-career teachers with more than 16 years of teaching experience. One teacher taught in a small school (1A and 2A), three in medium-sized schools (3A and 4A), and two in large schools (5A and 6A). Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants. The teachers' pseudonyms were Gayle, Jane, Lester, Savannah, Craig, and Robin.

Table 4.1*Summary of Characteristics of Participants (N=6)*

Characteristic	Frequency	Valid Percent	Mode
Gender			Female
Male	2	33.3	
Female	4	66.7	
Years of Experience			Late Career
Novice	2	33.3	
Mid-Career	1	16.7	
Late Career	3	50.0	
Size of School			3A
2A	1	16.7	
3A	2	33.3	
4A	1	16.7	
5A	1	16.7	
6A	1	16.7	
Teaches SEL Lessons			Yes
Yes	5	83.3	
No	1	16.7	

Research Objective One

The first research objective sought to determine teachers' social, emotional, and character development (SECD) perceptions. Teachers were aware of the importance of SECD and demonstrated this by discussing how they developed interpersonal and intrapersonal skills in their students. Based on their responses, teachers perceived their role in fostering SECD as integral to their work. They viewed themselves not just as content instructors but also as mentors who shape students' emotional and character growth. Their perceptions of roles concerning

SECD in the agricultural education context were reflected in three themes: SECD as a Foundation, Relationships and Safe Environments, and Challenges of Formal SECD (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2
Teacher Perceptions of Social, Emotional, and Character Development Themes

Theme	Description
SECD as a Foundation	Teachers view SECD as essential for student development and success in life, leadership, and careers.
Relationships & Safe Environments	Teachers view SECD as essential for student development and success in life, leadership, and careers.
Challenges of Formal SECD	Teachers expressed concern with rigid, scripted SEL programs that lack authenticity and flexibility.

Theme 1: SECD as a Foundation

Teachers in this study emphasized the importance of SECD and viewed these skills as a foundation for overall student development. They believed that promoting SECD competencies through character, personal, and social development, creates a growth mindset allowing students to become leaders and find pathways for success.

Craig placed an emphasis on developing students' SECD skills from a young age to place them on a path to be successful adults:

“It's really all about character development, and so you have to get the foundation started. And I think for just like the basic necessity skills of just... getting the foundation of them getting comfortable with the area of ... speaking, getting in that mindset. I guess the growth mindset of becoming a leader, um and how that might look for each kid, because I know each kid defines success in their own way, and so how that would look for each kid in their life and trying to find them pathways to what they want to do in their lives.”

He further shared that he believes it is vital to establish connections between SECD skills and students' goals, saying "tying them to what their career goals are and their successes are, can help them tie and make connections as far as those go."

Jane shared that collaboration with peers is critical in developing students' communication skills and self-awareness. She said that encouraging students to give and receive feedback in constructive ways teaches them how to engage with others respectfully while developing a growth mindset.

So it really helps them, I think, become more self-reflective, too... So having those forms of them becoming the evaluator instead of just me I think it gives them just a little bit more especially when they hear it from a peer that says, Oh, you're you were too fast! It means more to them coming from here than it does coming from me. And so I see that improvement a lot more in my stuff. My kids aren't outstanding speakers, but, like, you know, they're more confident than I think they were when they walked in the door.

Lester similarly expressed his awareness of how classroom strategies affect students' self-esteem and feeling of safety. He believed that thoughtfully structuring learning experiences can help protect students' personal and emotional development. He was especially aware of the importance of making students feel safe during vulnerable situations. He said, "If you put that first kid on the spot and they come up and they do it terrible—their self-esteem—you've just destroyed them."

Gayle also felt developing SECD skills was an important factor in helping student development. Specifically, she believed helping students set realistic goals and expectations for themselves helps set them up for future academic and personal success.

So helping kids be realistic ... in that aspect. And then, okay, so you didn't meet the goal. But what is something you can celebrate that you did accomplish with that goal. And it's really hard, too, because kids tend to like, really like get down on themselves if they don't do well.

Craig viewed problem solving as an essential aspect of helping students develop their social, emotional, and character skills. He believed that problem solving real-life situations and problems with peers serves as a foundation for student development.

How do we overcome these problems, and what could be a better solution? How can we fix the problem? But the going back to your whole teamwork and collaboration thing? You have to have that...They truly do learn from 'you have this whole plan and then you have conflict, and then you have to figure out how to solve the problem'...and so it's up to those kids to figure it out and try to figure out what solutions we can provide. And so that really teaches the real-life situational stuff, I think, is really important.

Robin believes it is important to allow students to fail in safe scenarios and believes it is a good way for them to see potential real-life consequences:

And so I think it's kind of a good thing to kind of set them up for failure in some of those safe scenarios, so that they can see like, oh, if I made that decision in real life I might actually be in a pickle. And so trying to set up the safe scenarios for them to actually make those decisions.

Lester also believed that getting students involved in their community is a valuable step in their development and serves as a foundation for social awareness. He said:

And so I think again, promoting that (community service) within our chapter, making kids on our participation chart our FFA. Oh, we're from the ag program at the high school. And so just the intentional offering those opportunities, I think, is the biggest part that we do.

Ultimately, the teachers in this case study recognized the importance of promoting and teaching SECD skills. They believed that SECD is a foundation upon which effective teaching, learning, and personal growth are built.

Theme 2: Relationships and Safe Environments

Teachers expressed the importance of building strong relationships with their students. They shared the relationships they build with their students are critical in supporting students social, emotional, and character growth and serve as foundations for addressing sensitive topics,

promoting student growth, and creating an environment where students feel comfortable and safe.

Teachers shared how these connections facilitate difficult but necessary conversations.

Lester explained how trust creates a safe environment for meaningful dialogue around personal challenges, such as hygiene:

So just realize that and take care of yourself, you know, like, it's just one of those things for my kids that have poor hygiene. It's one of those conversations you have to pull them to the side... talk to them about it. 'Everything going okay?' But it's all about building those relationships. So you can build those relationships with those students. You know you can... put the thought in their head that can grow...to what we know is their life.

Craig similarly shared about the value of connecting with students who may feel isolated:

Even though they have all their differences... having that value of building relationships is very important, because at the end of the day I always try to give that coin to that kid that... most kids don't want to build a relationship with. When you do that, you know... you're forcing kids to be with somebody that they don't really, necessarily like, but they have to be with them to learn.

Teachers also reflected on how agricultural education naturally lends itself to build connections with students. Jane for example said, "I think we're lucky because we're in ag ed, that, like just the connections that we make in the relationships that we build really help with some of that just organically."

Creating a safe classroom where students do not feel judgment from their teacher was another component discussed by the participants in the case study. They described fostering environments where students feel comfortable failing, asking questions, and seeking support.

Lester shared a story to explain the value of his open-door policy:

I try not to embarrass kids with it unless it's that sarcastic with a kid that I know that's going to be able to tolerate it, that I've developed a rapport... I think if you'd ask [student] the same thing she's like, 'Oh, I could go to Mr. Lester and ask him almost anything now.' She might not be comfortable asking anything, but I hope that... we're not in this

alone. We're in this together... So I think that's probably the biggest thing... that open-door policy.

He followed up his anecdote about the relationship and rapport he has with students with sharing how remaining calm as a teacher influences the classroom environment:

One [thing I] have learned over the years is... keeping calm as the teacher... So like if it does escalate, like you as a teacher have a very calm voice, you're very steady. So I think keeping my emotions in check, no matter what's going on, helps the students... they're able to like feed off of that control.

Together, these teachers' perspectives about fostering a safe and supportive environment demonstrate their belief that it is a deliberate and ongoing effort to help students feel seen, valued, and secure.

Theme 3: Challenges of Formal SECD

While teachers generally recognize the value of SECD, several participants expressed concerns about the limitations of formalized SECD curricula. Many referenced pre-packaged or scripted social-emotional learning (SEL) programs—particularly those delivered online or through rigid formats—as lacking the flexibility needed to support authentic student-teacher relationships. These teachers emphasized that such programs can become performative or lose their effectiveness if they are not implemented with sensitivity to students' needs, classroom context, or timing.

Lester expressed his skepticism toward scripted SEL tools, noting that effective SECD cannot be reduced to written procedures. He said, “I don't think empathy... I don't think some of these things for social, emotional can be taught with just a script on a piece of paper. They have to be natural interactions. That's just my opinion.”

Similarly, Robin described student disengagement and frustration with overly structured SEL programming:

It's no longer intentional, or the kids dread it. It's redundant. They just don't like it. So it's not doing its purpose whatsoever. I wish more teachers were capable of taking a concept, kind of developing what would work best for their kids around it and rolling with it, because I really think that's the best way to do it. But unfortunately, core teachers usually are the ones that struggle with that the most because they're so used to like this, then this and this and this, and then it doesn't work for everyone.”

Robin’s perspective showed a tension between teacher autonomy and prescriptive approaches. She felt that teachers need the flexibility to interpret and adapt SECD content in ways that align with their students' individual needs and classroom dynamics which is something prescribed curricula often prevent.

Jane added a more personal layer to this theme by acknowledging her own struggle with demonstrating and teaching empathy:

Because that's something that I personally really struggle with—strong empathy—because I would probably be considered a computer if my emotions were cataloged in a day. Um, and so that's something that I never really learned in college, and it's something that I probably struggle to teach in my classroom.

Jane’s feelings about modeling empathy illustrate the challenge of teaching social and emotional learning and emotional intelligence when educators themselves have not been trained or supported in developing those skills.

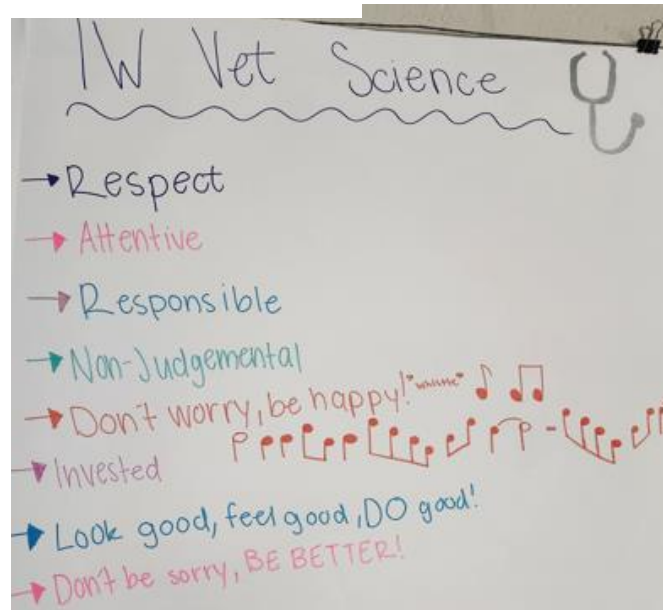
Savannah believed the SEL curriculum her school implements is well-intentioned, but echoed these concerns by describing how the lessons do not resonate with her students or fit her personal teaching style:

With the [SEL curriculum] stuff, we also have like a four question model. I'm not super fantastic at following it because our at least the kids that I see don't vibe with it very well, and I can usually do just like have a conversation, address it better than that.

Figure 4.1 demonstrates how Savannah encourages personalized SECD integration in her class. Her Veterinary Science class created their own classroom rules for positivity and displayed it in the classroom.

Figure 4.1

Image Depicting Personalized SECD Integration



Savannah's feelings toward SEL curricula reinforce the idea that rigid frameworks may not always be compatible with classroom realities, and that authentic, spontaneous interactions are often more effective. The sample lesson plan shared in Figure 4.2 depicts a scripted format of the SEL lessons she is mandated to teach. Savannah and other teachers in the case study felt that the scripted lessons were well intentioned, but did not allow for flexibility and personalization.

Figure 4.2

Sample of School-Mandated SEL Lesson Plan

October: My Brain is Like a Muscle That Grows!

Objectives (pg. 53):

1. Teach yourself and your students about neuroplasticity.
2. Test and develop brain-based teaching strategies.

"The measure of intelligence is the ability to change"-Albert Einstein

Resources

Meet Your Brain Lesson Plan (pgs. 57-61)

Brain Plasticity Lesson Plan (pgs. 65-67): **"Neurons that fire together, wire together."**

Path Through the Woods Analogy (pg. 62)

October: Turn Doubters into Believers with Science!

October: Turn Doubters into Believers with Science!

Brain Centric Teaching-Strategies into

Deeper Thinking (pgs. 69-70):

1. Determine schema.
2. Thinking Stems (pg. 69).
3. Think Sheets
4. Journaling
5. Model Metacognition
6. Risk-free environment
7. Encourage notations

Brain Boosting Activities (pg. 71):
"Whew!"

Our neurons have been working so hard making new connections, they need to energize. Time for a brain boost!"

1. Human knot
2. Air writing
3. Junk drawer
4. Yoga break
5. YouTube brain breaks
6. E-Moments

Research Objective One Summary

Overall, this theme shows the frustrations teachers face when navigating and teaching formal SECD or SEL programs. They shared feelings that scripted or overly structured approaches fail to meet students' needs. Instead, they emphasized the importance of authenticity and flexibility in fostering meaningful social, emotional, and character skills with their students. Additionally, some teachers acknowledged their personal limitations in modeling SECD skills, highlighting the challenges in effectively developing student emotional growth.

Teachers in this case study recognized social, emotional, and character development as a foundation to student success and believed fostering and promoting these skills was an essential part of their role as an SBAE teacher. They emphasized the importance of strong student-teacher relationships and safe, supportive classrooms in supporting student growth and creating space for meaningful conversations and learning experiences. While teachers found value in SECD, they expressed frustration and skepticism in formal SEL curricula mandated by their schools. They instead valued authentic, flexible approaches to teaching SECD that fits their students' individual needs. Overall, the findings show that teachers believed SECD is best accomplished through intentional relationships, real-life application, and supportive environments.

Research Objective Two

Unlike the first research objective, which focused on teachers' perceptions of SECD, the second objective centers on the specific strategies and practices teachers use to actively foster students' social, emotional, and character development in their classrooms. Teachers' descriptions of how they actively promote SECD in their teaching practices are based on data collected from case study interviews and supporting document analysis, organized around the themes. The themes, categories, and codes can be found in Table (4.3). The responses from the interviews naturally aligned with the three overall standards of the Kansas SECD standards – Character Development, Personal Development, and Social Development (KSDE, n.d.) and encompassed four major themes: creating a supportive and relational learning environment, intentional integration of SECD in agricultural education context, empowering students through responsibility and self-advocacy, and modeling and mentoring student development.

Table 4.3*Themes, Categories, and Codes from Interviews and Document Analysis of Teacher Practices.*

Theme	Category	Classroom Practice
Supportive Learning Environment	Focused and Positive Classroom	Remove distractions Greeting students Being accessible to students Student collaboration Having a calm presence Break-out boxes, role-playing, case studies
Intentional Integration	Real-World Application Student-Centered Learning Goal Setting Social Awareness Civic Engagement Effective Communication	Problem-based learning, inquiry-based learning Teaching SMART goals Career exploration, motivational speakers Host community FFA events, attend community meetings, community mapping, patriotic education Speech circles, presentations, drafting manuscripts, writing professional emails, scholarship applications
Student Responsibility	Expectations Self-Advocacy	Communicating clear rules Find answers to questions, teach students to speak for themselves
Modeling	Professionalism Community Participation Emotional Honesty	Dressing for the occasion, display awards Involvement in civic organizations Communicating emotions, open-door policy, communicating self-care

Theme 1: Creating a Supportive Learning Environment

Teachers believed creating a supportive learning environment was paramount for fostering students' social, emotional, and character skills. They shared strategies they used to make positive and comfortable classrooms where students felt safe and free to make mistakes. They believed minimizing distractions and building a strong student-teacher rapport fostered peer collaboration and a sense of community where students feel safe and empowered to grow.

Jane explained how she tries to create a calm classroom environment. She said when she started teaching at her latest school, she did an entire classroom remodel, taking everything off

the walls to create a blank space. She said, “Taking away some of those distractions kind of calm down and focus things, I think, helps students... Just kind of finding a calming environment when they come in the room.”

A positive classroom environment was a priority for teachers. Savannah greets students at the door to make them feel welcome. She explained:

Part of the [SEL curriculum] model is where it, has us greeting students at the door. I'm usually just like, how's your day? How's it going? It's cold outside, why are you wearing shorts? Um, just like little like two second comments as they walk in the door, just to kind of greet them and make them feel welcome.

Savannah also starts classes by sharing positive things to foster a positive environment. She said, "we just like spend the first few minutes of class talking about things that we're happy about...just the random little happy things and we'll just kind of like popcorn it out.”

Lester emphasized building rapport and positive relationships with students. He said, “So you develop it all comes down to that rapport. So you develop that rapport with them, and then you're able to advise them.” He also makes himself accessible to students, saying, "I can be someone they can come to talk to, and it's an open-door policy.” Lester also said it is important to share his own emotions with students to build trust. He said:

Kids have seen me cry. They've seen me laugh. I, I think you have to build that rapport with kids before you can show them empathy, because otherwise they're not going to understand why you're behaving the way you're behaving

Robin shared how she has created a classroom environment where students feel comfortable asking questions. She said, "a lot of it is creating an environment where kids are comfortable to ask questions and ... ask for help.” She also highlighted the importance of a calm teacher presence for regulating student emotions and provides a space for students to cool off if needed, explaining:

Keeping calm as the teacher so ... if it does escalate ... you as a teacher, have a very calm voice, you're very steady...it gives them a spot to go cool off so that they're ready to come back to the classroom.

Craig similarly shared how he strives to create a collaborative learning environment. He said positivity is essential to student learning and contributes to the collaborative atmosphere. He said, "In my classroom we have a ... learning environment, learning community...as a collaborative group trying to learn something. And when you set that expectation...also the positivity in the classroom ... is a must on that aspect too."

These educators underscored the critical role of a supportive learning environment in nurturing students' social, emotional, and character development. Their diverse strategies, such as minimizing distractions, fostering positive relationships, and cultivating a sense of safety and community, collectively contribute to classrooms where students feel secure enough to learn and take risks. Ultimately, this intentional creation of a comfortable and encouraging atmosphere lays the groundwork for students to thrive both academically and personally.

Theme 2: Intentional Integration of SECD through Agricultural Education

The teachers in this study shared how they weave social, emotional, and character development into their various agricultural education programs. They recognized the valuable context that agricultural education and FFA provide for real-world application and interpersonal collaboration. Teachers intentionally create learning experiences to foster critical interpersonal and intrapersonal skills alongside technical agricultural knowledge.

Jane and Savannah explained that providing applicable, real-world problems related to agriculture help them facilitate problem-solving skills. Jane said:

I try to create as many real-world application problems as I can. I think because I've got an ag class. It makes it, I think easier than other classes to create those opportunities for students, so tying it into the real world and making them try to think on their feet and

figure out a way to go about that.

One of Jane's techniques for integrating SECD is through break-out boxes in which students learn to solve problems. She said she has a free subscription for break-out boxes and has created mini breakouts. Jane said these activities are student-centered, so she is hands-off on instruction, allowing them to focus on the problem. With this technique, Jane shared how students are initially frustrated when they cannot open the break-out box:

At first they get very, very frustrated when they cannot like get the code. So I ... tend to start, probably like very elementary and very easy with some of the codes to kind of work them up, because, especially some of the ones that I got from Kansas Corn I felt like were really hard. So like, I just kind of created some of my own like, here's a fun one. Here's 1 about whatever topic we're going over

Similarly, Savannah uses real-world scenarios in her classes, such as having students act as CEOs to solve problems in landscape and horticulture. She explained:

If we're doing landscape, we go outside, we look at the landscaping around the school. Um, if we're talking about entomology, we take them to the greenhouse, we look for pests. I'll be like, you're the CEO of this company. Here's your clients, how do you handle it?

Craig also embeds problem-solving in his courses. He uses shop problem-solving activities and case studies related to safety to teach responsibility and decision-making. He explained that when introducing the Greenhand FFA members and agricultural education students about shop safety, he sets up a "crime scene".

Understanding where tools go, what can result from certain specific things that can happen in the shop. If you don't listen or don't do what you're supposed to be told, or don't follow the rules, um and doing like a whole case study with the injured person and the crime scene. And I, I love that. It's fun. But doing that kind of stuff, understanding... That's what can happen. And it gets their wheels turning.

Robin shared that she integrates problem-solving and critical thinking skills through project-based learning with an inquiry-based approach in her agricultural classes. She said these

learning strategies require students to “figure things out themselves.” For example, in a 3D biome project, she gives the requirements but not exact steps, encouraging students to use resources and examples to guide their work.

Lester said he uses teamwork and collaboration to integrate problem-solving in his agricultural mechanics classes:

Okay so and so has this issue. I'll have the student, maybe explain what they've done, what they've tried those types of things and then ask for suggestions. Okay, okay, we're all on the team. If we were manufacturing, we're manufacturing this project, what suggestions do you have? And we'll go around and 2 or 3 people just be a popcorn type. They'll just respond.

Teachers discussed how they implement goals in their programs. Gayle said her students set academic and personal SMART goals at the beginning of the year. She said she celebrates students' goals throughout the year.

Whenever we get back to school, I'm gonna go recognize those kids who like met their academic goal for the semester... helping kids recognize like, okay, I didn't meet this goal. But what can I take away from that?"

Robin also teaches her students about SMART goals, and all her students set goals in August. She takes it further with her officers by having them record their goals.

We have had them record them... saying their goals. And then, when we do our like Midwinter or our officer party. They get to watch themselves say those goals that they had in August, and that's, I think, been impactful for them. They also have to tell us advisors, like what their goals are while they're doing that. And I think that's been impactful because it's not just writing it down; it's saying it. And then it gives you a good chance to look at [in] like a few months and like, Oh, I said I was gonna do this, and I haven't really done that yet.

Savannah encourages goal setting with her students relating to their current academic performance. She said, “for class before we take a test, I'm like, OK, think about what you want

your grade to be, set your goal somewhere, write it down somewhere. And then let's loop back to it afterwards.”

Teachers also shared samples of lesson plans they use to guide students in goal setting. Craig uses a lesson called “A Look into the Future,” where students reflect, set goals, and write a personal vision statement. Robin also teaches a year-long curriculum which helps students adopt a growth mindset. This curriculum is organized into monthly themes, each with specific objectives and lessons for creating a positive learning environment. A key element of the curriculum focuses on defining and creating SMART goals.

Teachers promote goal setting by integrating career exploration and planning, aligning both to create meaningful and purposeful classroom experiences. Craig shared how he teaches students to establish career connections early on and set career goals. He further explained, “We do a bunch of different things with career exploration. And they find a career they want to set down, they add those into their AET the careers they might be interested in.”

Robin also places importance on how to be respectful of others. She teaches a lesson about empathy, showing a video from a past National FFA Convention where Dr. Rick Rigsby is a keynote speaker. His message focuses on values and highlights individuals having different backgrounds. Robin described this video and lesson as a valuable way to teach students about judgment.

Lester shared flyers his students made for FFA activities to promote social awareness. Their chapter hosts an FFA Christmas Party and FFA Harvest for Hunger. The flyer states that the party, organized by FFA members, promotes empathy and social awareness by encouraging students to visit a nursing home or wrap gifts for their adopted family for the holidays. Harvest

for Hunger is a food drive organized by FFA members to benefit those who are food insecure in their community (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.3

Flyer for Food Drive Demonstrating Social Awareness.



Robin teaches community mapping and geography awareness by having her 8th grade students identify and map local businesses, broadening their perspective of the community. She incorporates service-learning projects with her high school students. She said they are able to connect community discussions based on what they learned from about their community mapping project in 8th grade.

It's kind of our first time that we also tie that in with the civic engagement process about how you can be doing a project and with service learning. So it kind of almost builds from when they were 8th graders about talking about the different communities. And then, now, where is it that we could get back into our communities.

Teachers modeled active civic participation by engaging with community organizations and building strong community relationships. Craig actively participated in community meetings and civic organizations, including the Fair Board, School Board, Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, and organizing a community luncheon during FFA Week. He illustrated the importance of building and maintaining community connections by involving students in these community interactions.

Teachers emphasized civic responsibility by integrating patriotic education and civic principles into their courses. Lester, for example, organized a flag-burning ceremony to teach students respectful and patriotic practices:

We did a school-wide. We did a flag burning, an appropriate flag burning. We brought in a military person did an all school assembly. We burned the flags previously, but we showed the video to the entire school of us, showing the patriotic way to do that, but we had to make it intentional.

Craig also emphasizes teaching active citizenship by using a civic engagement curriculum in his leadership class.

Teachers integrated public speaking opportunities to enhance students' oral communication skills. Jane utilizes speech circles with progressively larger groups, allowing students to build confidence in public speaking. She said, "I try to build them up from like you're gonna start with a partner pair. And then we're gonna like, just increase the size of each of those groups to kind of help with some of that." Jane believes through her speech circles, students value and respond better to feedback from their peers than if it came from her.

Similarly, Lester encourages students to practice presentations privately before presenting to the whole class, ensuring positive experiences to reduce fear and build self-confidence. Craig also emphasized overcoming public speaking anxiety through FFA Creed presentations and speeches. He said he gradually increases the audience size to ease students into public speaking.

Robin incorporated oral presentations using slide decks, helping students communicate ideas clearly and effectively. These methods of helping students gain confidence in public speaking are also valuable feedback and reflection tools.

Teachers also viewed written communication skills as an essential component of interpersonal communication. They shared how they teach students to draft manuscripts, write scholarship applications, and use digital correspondence. Robin teaches written communication by integrating writing into presentations, encouraging students to organize arguments and communicate research findings effectively. Lester emphasized manuscript writing, scholarship applications, and peer editing while modeling professional digital communication through email training. He said:

As we know, high school kids...they don't use email. But that's how a lot of times... things are communicated to them, but I teach them how to read through those emails. I encourage them to check the emails, whether I'm there [or not]. I send them emails... I just force them to use it and I kind of model...I'll ask them to email me.

Savannah also emphasizes digital communication with her students. She said she uses BandApp, a communication app for groups, and Google Classroom announcements to promote clear and efficient digital communication.

The diverse strategies employed by agricultural educators demonstrate a commitment to intentionally integrating SECD within their curriculum. By fostering ethical decision-making, cultivating supportive classroom environments, promoting problem-solving skills, nurturing self-awareness and goal setting, and emphasizing social responsibility and collaboration, these teachers recognize that SECD is not separate from academic learning but rather a foundational element for student success in agriculture and beyond. Their approaches highlight the unique opportunities within agricultural education to prepare students with both technical and essential life skills.

Theme 3: Empowering Students Through Responsibility

Jane sets clear rules and expectations and maintains consistency to help students understand their responsibilities. She said:

But when it's very, very clear black and white expectations. I think it's easier for me to say, okay, let's look at the rules together. Are we meeting that? Are we doing that together as a pair, what are the expectations that you've set for each other? And so, and even if it's not something that's a rule that we've got in the classroom. Then I'll be like, okay, so what are the expectations that you have for each other that you're arguing about? And I try to go at it that way. And I think that helps.

In addition to setting clear rules and expectations to help students understand their responsibility, teachers also explained the importance of promoting safety in the classroom, shop, and greenhouse. Lester shared how he sets expectations and holds students responsible for their actions in his courses. He said:

Probably the biggest strategy that I use is if a kid is messing up in class it, if it's completely unsafe, I'm probably gonna raise my voice and I'm gonna get everybody's attention and draw people to it, whether it's in the shop, the greenhouse, a lab in class. I'm gonna raise my voice and I'm going to approach it to stop that behavior, the unsafe behavior.

Gayle emphasized how she helps students learn to take responsibility for their learning and actions. An example she shared was, "That is your responsibility, right? And I really like, have kids take responsibility for their learning in their actions. And I'm like, I'm not gonna spoon feed you.... when I know kids can, are perfectly capable of it". She also teaches self-advocacy, telling them, "I need you to speak up for yourself. So, you're being an advocate for yourself...learning how to be their own advocate. And what does that mean? That means, you know, asking for help. That means addressing your teachers correctly"

Savannah said she focuses on making students answer their own questions rather than providing the answers herself. She shared one of her goals was "to get better at making them answer questions instead of me answering questions for them."

We also strongly encourage them to ask questions and post stuff. We kind of have an announcements area in my classroom that we keep track of. And then as far as classroom goes, I use a lot with Google Classroom and so I will put a question up on the stream and let them comment to communicate that way. And then I'll also do things like asking their opinions and what they think on different things and so like that kind of gives them that chance for some feedback and to talk to each other and so if they're needing any clarification or help with something, then they can kind of use that to be like, oh, you're struggling with this part. I got that one down. Let me help you there and kind of do it that way.

Robin agreed that empowering students through responsibility is vital to their development. She shared that she allows her senior students to have access to their cell phones during class as a lesson in responsibility:

The reason that I do that is because I feel like next year there's no one telling them to put away their cell phone, whether they're at work, whether they're going to community college, whether they go to college, whatever it is that they do. It's a safe place for them to fail with that kind of distraction that's there, and I tell them that from the very beginning. And when those first few lessons start coming in and like the kids, maybe that are on their phones or listening to music aren't doing as well as the others, it's a great opportunity to be like, hmm...yes, you have the privilege of being able to have it out, but are you utilizing that? And so to me, finding that opportunity for kids to make them safe, teaching moments is a really good way of being able to show them and teach them.

These teachers empower students by fostering a sense of responsibility for their learning and actions. Through strategies such as establishing clear expectations, encouraging self-advocacy, prompting students to find their own answers, and providing safe spaces to learn from consequences, teachers cultivate independence and accountability. This approach equips students with essential life skills which extend beyond the classroom, preparing them for future challenges and taking ownership of their choices.

Theme 4: Modeling for Student Development

Teachers perceive themselves as role models and mentors who influence their students not just by teaching agricultural content, but also by fostering their social, emotional, and character growth.

Teachers shared how they model professionalism by dressing professionally. Jane and Savannah explained how they model professionalism through their attire and work ethic. Jane said, "I always wear like a nice blouse, and those types of things, and I always fix my hair...always look good, feel good, and I even tell that to my students." Lester similarly said that when students are in official FFA dress, he always wears a coat and tie.

Craig also emphasized the professionalism that surrounds official dress. He said:

I give them a letter...I put in each one of the letter...that goes in their jacket. I sneak it in there when they get their jackets for the first time and on this jacket it says, from your, it's a letter from their FFA jacket, dear FFA member, and it talks about the history of the FFA jacket, and then it says...you represent your home and your school and your community. You represent yourself.

Figure 4.4

Letter Placed in Student FFA Jackets Emphasizing Professionalism.

IF THIS JACKET COULD TALK

I know that to you, I may seem old. Well, I was officially adopted in 1933, which to many people is ancient history. I hear the groans from students when advisors say, "Everyone is to be in official dress." Maybe that's because you don't really understand me. I am more than just a mass of blue corduroy, gold emblems, zippers, and buttons. Before you put me on, take a minute to consider what I really am:

1. A living legacy that started with 33 young men in 1928 and has grown to over a million students across the United States.
2. You're wearing an emblem of the #1 industry in the world—Agriculture.
3. You're wearing a uniform that is recognized by business people that operate our farms, Main Street businesses, and Fortune 500 companies on Wall Street.
4. You're wearing an advertisement of yourself, your school, your community and your country.
5. You're wearing a symbol that represents your willingness to invest in your own personal growth and service to others.

So when you put me on, either you wear me with pride and try to represent all that I stand for or don't wear me at all.

Sincerely,

~Your FFA Jacket~

Lester also shared he believes sharing his personal achievements and chapter awards in the classroom builds professionalism by sparking interest and conversations.

Around my classroom [I've] got some awards I've received through ag teaching. I've got the ag teachers Creed...a couple of awards that I received, um State officer, you know, gifts. But demonstrating professionalism is I put those things out because they're conversation feature pieces. Kids will ask questions and then I'm able to tell a story with those with those questions.

Teachers modeled active civic participation by engaging in community organizations and building strong community relationships. Craig, for example attended meetings of the local fair board, school board, chamber of commerce, Rotary Club, and organizing a community luncheon during FFA Week. He illustrated the importance of building and maintaining community connections by involving students in these community interactions.

Teachers model self-awareness to foster this understanding and practice in their students by openly recognizing and communicating their own emotions. This modeling of self-awareness and self-management helps students learn to identify and express their feelings. Several teachers discussed how they are open and honest about their own feelings with their students. Lester said:

Kids have seen me cry. They've seen me laugh. I think you have to build that rapport with kids before you can show them empathy, because otherwise they're not going to understand why you're behaving the way you're behaving... if you're willing to cry that you're willing to let your guard down. So kids will do the same thing. But if you don't build that rapport, you're not going to be able to have that situation and be able to demonstrate that to them you can say the passing words.

Lester also emphasized his open-door policy. He said he invites his students to seek his mentorship or advice at any time. Gayle and Savannah echoed Lester's position of being honest and open. Savannah said they share with their students when they are having difficult days and that it helps students to acknowledge their own emotions.

Teachers also discussed how they model self-awareness and self-management through self-care. They said they have priorities and communicate them with students. Robin said she promotes self-awareness and self-management to students by practicing self-care:

I take off for my family, or that my family is important. I know that's not exactly self-care, but those are the moments that are important to me. So my students know what's important to me, and what I go to and everything else. So I think that goes back to that whole modeling thing of taking care of yourself. I think modeling for the kids about taking off when my family needs me to take off.

Jane also practices self-care as a way of promoting self-awareness and self-management. She talks with students about regulating her schedule by setting boundaries and going home at 4 o'clock every day to spend time with her family.

By demonstrating professionalism through their attire and actions, engaging in civic life, and openly sharing their own emotions and self-care practices, they provide tangible examples

for students to emulate. Modeling coupled with mentorship through open and honest communication, fosters social, emotional, and character development, shaping students for future success.

Research Objective Two Summary

The teachers in this study emphasized the foundational role of a supportive and inclusive learning environment in fostering students' social, emotional, and character development. They intentionally created positive classrooms by minimizing distractions, building strong rapport, and establishing clear expectations to ensure students felt safe to learn and take risks. Through engaging activities like group work, real-world applications, and project-based learning, teachers actively integrated these skills into their programs, encouraging collaboration, problem-solving, and goal setting. Furthermore, they empowered students by promoting responsibility and self-advocacy, allowing them to learn from their choices within a supportive context. Recognizing their broader influence, these educators also served as mentors and role models, demonstrating professionalism, emotional honesty, and community involvement to cultivate trust and guide students' personal and professional growth.

Results Summary

Teachers actively embrace their roles as models and mentors, understanding their influence extends beyond the agricultural curriculum. They employ diverse and intentional strategies to integrate social, emotional, and character learning in their classrooms and FFA chapters. They believe their role is crucial in fostering these skills to develop well-rounded individuals who will be prepared for academic, personal, and career success, as well as contributing and engaged members of their communities. By creating supportive classrooms,

intentionally integrating SECD, empowering students through responsibility, and serving as role models, the teachers in this case study aimed to equip students with both technical and life skills.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

This qualitative study sought to investigate Kansas SBAE teachers' perceptions of SECD and the practices they use to promote student well-being. The overarching research objective for this study was "How do Kansas SBAE teachers perceive they foster social, emotional, and character development in their programs?" There were two research objectives:

1. Determine teachers' perceptions of their role in social, emotional, and character development.
2. Examine the strategies and practices teachers use to foster students' social, emotional, and character development in their programs.

After expressing interest through a Qualtrics survey distributed to SBAE teachers, teachers were selected to participate in a case study. The survey aimed to capture their perceptions of SECD. Of the nine teachers chosen for the study, six ultimately participated. Selection was based on various factors, including years of experience, gender identity, school size, and familiarity with teaching explicit SEL lessons. Interview questions were modeled after the CASEL *School-based Staff Survey on Schoolwide SEL Implementation* (CASEL, 2021).

The six participating agricultural education teachers represented diverse backgrounds, offering a broad context for understanding their approaches to SECD. They varied in gender identity and teaching experience—from novice to late-career educators—and came from schools of varying sizes, including small, medium, and large. A notable finding was that most of these teachers reported intentionally incorporating explicit SEL lessons into their teaching, often as part of school-directed initiatives. This highlights their commitment to supporting student development beyond academic instruction.

The findings highlight the teacher participants' awareness of the role SECD plays within their classrooms, as well as the intentional practices they employ to cultivate these skills.

Teacher participants articulated their professional responsibilities that went beyond content delivery, encompassing modeling, mentorship, and the growth of their students. They recognized SECD not as an extra activity, but as an essential component of effective teaching and student achievement. To foster the SECD competencies they deemed essential for future student success, they implemented a diverse range of teaching strategies and practices.

This chapter focuses on conclusions, implications, and recommendations for research and practice based on the case study results.

Summary of Themes

Teacher Perceptions

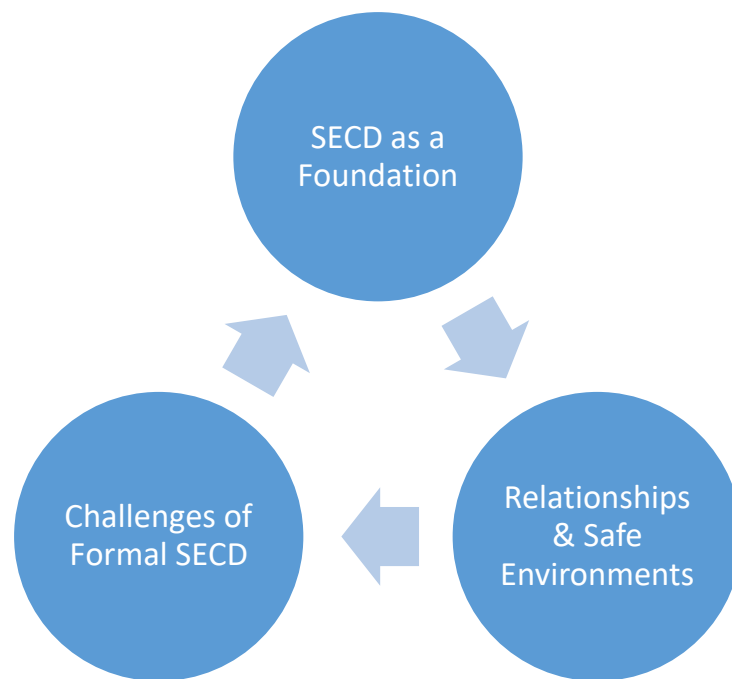
Teachers in this study viewed SECD as essential to students' overall success—both in and beyond the classroom, reinforcing previous research on the role teachers play in student development (Ee & Cheng, 2013; Elias & Weissberg, 2000). They described their views about SECD and the perceptions of their roles in developing students' social, emotional, and character competencies. They felt their role was to actively shape students' growth in areas that align with social-emotional competencies such as responsibility, self-management, interpersonal communication, growth mindset, and social awareness through intentional strategies and supportive learning environments (CASEL, n.d.; Elias & Weissberg, 2000).

In sharing their perceptions, teachers focused on social, emotional, and character development as a foundation for student development and the value of fostering relationships and safe environments. They also shared their opinions and perceptions about the challenges they face in implementing formal SECD curricula as mandated by their schools. They questioned the

validity and effectiveness of prescribed lessons and shared frustrations in its lack of authenticity and flexibility. Figure 5.1 shows the themes surrounding teachers' perceptions of SECD that emerged in this study. These themes support social-emotional competencies within the CASEL framework (CASEL, n.d.) and character development as outlined by Lerner (2009).

Figure 5.1

Themes of Teacher Perceptions Relating to Social, Emotional, and Character Development.



SECD as a Foundation Teachers in this study overwhelmingly viewed social, emotional, and character development as crucial for student growth and future success. They believed that cultivating SECD skills, such as communication, self-awareness, a growth mindset, and problem-solving, provides a basis for academic achievement, leadership, and career readiness. The teacher-participants highlighted the importance of starting SECD early and connecting skills to students' goals and real-world experiences.

Relationships and Safe Environments The participating teachers emphasized the role of strong student-teacher relationships in fostering social, emotional, and character growth. They

believed the connections they make with students create safe and supportive classroom environments where students feel comfortable asking for help, taking risks, and engaging in open communication. Building rapport with students and maintaining a calm demeanor allows teachers to foster a climate where students have a sense of security and trust.

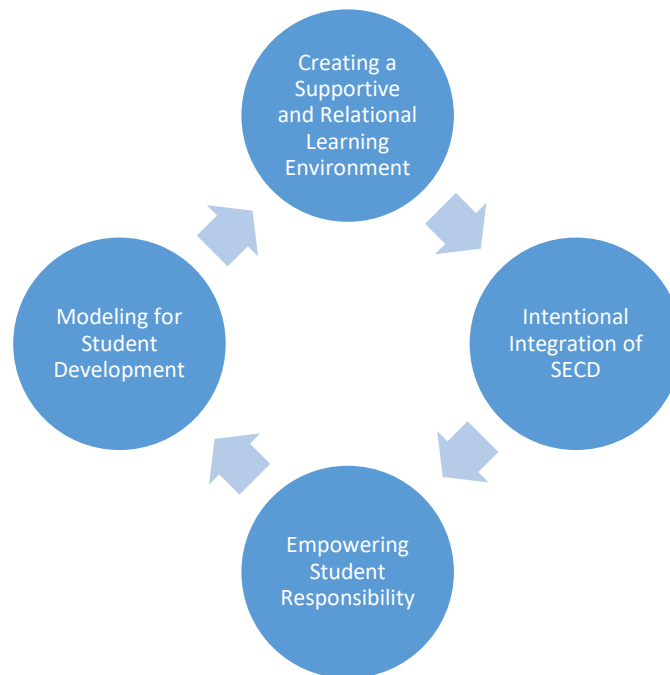
Challenges of Formal SECD While teachers in this case study acknowledged the importance of SECD, they expressed concerns about the effectiveness of formal, scripted lessons implemented by their schools. They believed these curricula were rigid and lacked authenticity and flexibility, preventing them from connecting with their students and capitalizing on the relationships they have built. Teachers felt these programs were disengaging and hinder the intended purpose. They believe that authentic, adaptable lessons would allow them to more effectively integrate SECD into their teaching in ways that better resonate with students. Additionally, some teachers acknowledge the need for more training in modeling SECD skills.

Teacher Practices

Kansas SBAE teachers play a vital role in developing students' social, emotional, and character competencies. Figure 5.2 illustrates the purposeful strategies teachers use to foster supportive and inclusive classroom environments, provide hands-on, real-world, and student-centered learning opportunities, and encourage students to take ownership of their personal growth. Further, building a foundation of safety and belonging through strong relationships and supportive environments, as described by teachers in this study, is critical for fostering students' self-esteem and self-actualization, aligning with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943). Teachers in this study shared how they serve as role models by demonstrating professionalism, emotional awareness, and community involvement (Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2

Teacher Practices of Integrating Social, Emotional, and Character Development Themes.



Creating a Supportive and Relational Learning Environment Teachers believed this was paramount for fostering SECD. They used strategies to create positive and comfortable classrooms where students felt safe, such as minimizing distractions, greeting students at the door, starting classes with positive sharing, building rapport and positive relationships, being accessible, sharing their own emotions to build trust, creating an environment where students feel comfortable asking questions, maintaining a calm teacher presence, and fostering a collaborative learning environment with positivity. The supportive and predictable classroom environments that teachers described in this study support Maslow's (1943) need for safety that students look for from teachers.

Intentional Integration of SECD in the Agricultural Education Context Teachers shared how they weave SECD into their programs, recognizing the valuable context of agricultural education and FFA for real-world application and interpersonal collaboration,

contributing to essential skills valued in the workplace (Marlatt et al., 2003). They highlighted a variety of methods they use to foster students' social, emotional, and character development. Their instructional practices intentionally integrate real-world applications and student-centered learning strategies to cultivate essential skills such as problem-solving, collaboration, and communication. Furthermore, teachers actively promote personal growth through goal setting, career exploration, and the development of responsibility and self-awareness. By also emphasizing social awareness, empathy, and civic engagement through various activities and community connections, these teachers demonstrated a commitment to developing well-rounded individuals prepared for success both within and beyond the classroom. These findings underscore the significant role of agricultural education in nurturing not only technical skills but also the critical social and emotional competencies necessary for future citizens and professionals (Akers et al., 2004).

Empowering Student Responsibility Teachers emphasized fostering a sense of responsibility for students' learning and behavior, aligning with previous research (Ee & Cheng, 2013; Elias & Weissberg, 2000; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). They established clear expectations, encouraged self-advocacy, promoted independence by having students seek their own answers, and created safe opportunities for students to learn from their choices, for example, by gradually allowing more personal responsibility, such as limited cell phone use for older students.

Modeling for Student Development Teachers perceived themselves as role models and mentors. They modeled professionalism by dressing professionally, emphasizing the importance of official FFA dress, sharing personal achievements and chapter awards, participating actively in community organizations, modeling emotional honesty by openly communicating their own emotions, having an open-door policy, and modeling self-care by communicating their priorities

and engaging in activities outside of school. These examples shared by teachers in this study support research and recommendations for teacher modeling (Ee & Cheng, 2013; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Synthesis of Findings

Participant Demographics

It was important to understand and describe the characteristics of the Kansas SBAE teachers who participated in this case study. The case study included six Kansas SBAE teachers with a range of backgrounds and experiences. Most participants were women and held traditional teaching certificates. The teachers had varying levels of experience, with the majority being in the late stages of their careers. Most taught in medium-sized schools (3A-4A) and incorporated social-emotional learning into their instruction. Understanding these characteristics helped provide context for the strategies they use to support student development.

Research Objective One

The first research objective aimed to determine teacher-participants' perceptions and the extent to which SBAE teachers recognize the importance of fostering SECD skills in students. Teachers in this study viewed SECD as a fundamental component of student success and believed their role as a teacher was integral to shaping students' emotional and character growth. They emphasized the importance of building strong relationships and creating safe environments for their students, which they believed is critical in fostering student development. However, many teachers shared their concerns about lacking knowledge and confidence in teaching social-emotional learning, citing gaps in their teacher education programs and schools.

SECD as a Foundation These examples illustrate the myriad ways in which teachers perceive their role in fostering the social, emotional, and character development of their students.

They strongly believed that promoting SECD competencies was essential for student development and success in life, leadership, and careers. They believed that developing these skills from a young age, like middle school or freshmen, helps to set students on a path to be successful adults by gaining basic necessary skills like public speaking and developing a growth mindset, reflecting Maslow's (1943) view that social and emotional growth is essential for individuals to reach their full potential. By helping students develop SECD competencies early on, teachers are nurturing the growth needed for self-actualization. Additionally, teachers believed it was critical to establish connections between SECD skills they were learning in their agriculture classes and FFA to their personal and career goals (Ee & Cheng, 2013; Elias & Weissberg, 2000; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Zolkoski et al. 2021). These perceptions align with the CASEL framework, particularly within the five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, n.d.).

Teachers' perceptions of SECD as a foundation support CASEL's (n.d.) five core components. Teachers shared that collaboration with peers was a critical component for developing communication skills and self-awareness, especially when encouraging students to give and receive constructive feedback. They also recognized that intentionally structuring learning experiences was important to students' personal development, particularly being mindful of making students feel safe during vulnerable situations. Teachers shared that they believed helping students set realistic goals and expectations and celebrating their accomplishments was important for their future success.

Problem-solving real-life situations was another area teachers in this case study agreed was paramount for student development. They believed students learn by navigating conflicts

and finding solutions, both individually and with peers. Some teachers shared that they felt a responsibility to allow students to fail in safe scenarios to help them understand real-life consequences. They viewed community involvement as a valuable step in their development and a foundation for social awareness (CASEL, n.d.). Teachers felt that offering community engagement opportunities was a significant part of their role as teachers.

Relationships and Safe Environments A central perception of the teachers in this study was the importance of building strong relationships with their students. They shared that the connections they made with students were critical for supporting student SECD growth and served as foundations for addressing sensitive topics, promoting growth, and creating environments where students felt comfortable and safe. These perceptions align with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which emphasizes that before students can engage in higher-order cognitive functions such as problem-solving or self-actualization, their basic needs for safety, belonging, and love must first be met (Maslow, 1943). By prioritizing relationships and classroom safety, SBAE teachers are attending to these foundational needs. The relationships teachers described are built on trust and allow for meaningful dialogue. Further supporting the student-teacher relationship, some teachers shared that it is especially important to connect with students who may feel isolated. They perceived the importance of peer interactions and intentional grouping as important in developing student social awareness and relationship skills (CASEL, n.d.).

Teachers believed they had a duty to create a classroom where students do not feel judgment. They aimed to foster environments where students feel comfortable failing, asking questions, and seeking support. Teachers felt that to create a supportive environment, they need to create a sense of shared responsibility where students do not feel alone, with one teacher emphasizing his open-door policy. Additionally, they understood that maintaining their

composure and remaining calm significantly influenced their classroom environment. They believed that their demeanor allowed students to feed off their control and prevented situations from escalating. Finally, teachers felt that the context of agricultural education naturally lends itself to building connections with students and creating safe environments, noting the multiple opportunities teachers have to interact with students through FFA.

Challenges of Formal SECD While recognizing the value of SECD, teachers in this case study expressed concerns about the limitations of formalized or scripted social and emotional learning curricula they must teach in their schools. They felt that pre-packaged programs delivered online or in rigid formats lacked authenticity and flexibility, undermining the relationships they have built with their students. They felt these programs were less effective because they were not sensitive to students' needs or classroom dynamics. Teachers voiced skepticism towards the scripted lessons and believed that effective SECD competencies like empathy cannot be taught with a script but require natural interactions. Teachers further described student disengagement and frustration with the overly structured SECD lessons, noting students felt the lessons were redundant.

In addition to frustrations with scripted SECD lessons, some teachers also shared their personal limitations in demonstrating or teaching SECD skills. While some teachers readily shared their comfortability with being honest about their emotions with students, others felt ill prepared to teach about sensitive competencies like empathy. They attributed their struggles with modeling and fostering sensitive competencies because they did not feel comfortable showing their own emotions. Some teachers also believed the lack of pre-service teacher training left them feeling unprepared to teach SECD competencies.

This research indicates that the Kansas SBAE teachers in this study are highly aware of the importance of social, emotional, and character development into their programs and view it as a foundation to student success. They see themselves as content instructors and mentors who are essential in shaping students' social and emotional growth and character development. They emphasized the importance of strong student-teacher relationships and safe, supportive classrooms in promoting student growth. This supports existing research highlighting the expanding role of schools in meeting students' diverse needs (Ormiston et al., 2015; Santre, 2022) and the relevance of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) in educational practice. Additionally, teachers' daily interactions and the learning environment they create not only contribute to students' SECD, they are also core components of good teaching (Eck et al., 2019). While valuing SECD, teachers had reservations about the effectiveness of scripted SECD curricula mandated by their schools, believing authentic, flexible approaches best fit students' needs. Overall, the teacher's perceptions unveiled in this study are important to understanding how teachers can be supported in integrating and teaching SECD in the future (Ee & Cheng, 2013; Kam et al., 2003).

Research Objective Two

The second research objective sought to explore the teaching practices SBAE teachers use to integrate social, emotional, and character development into their programs. Kansas SBAE teachers reported a variety of strategies to support SECD within both their classrooms and FFA chapters. The practices shared through this case study reflect a strong commitment to not only developing students' agricultural content knowledge but also fostering well-rounded individuals equipped for success in all areas of life. Many of the approaches described by participants were not explicitly designed to promote social, emotional, and character development, yet they

naturally aligned with characteristics of high-quality and effective teaching, as identified in previous research (Eck et al., 2019; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

The teachers in this study highlighted the importance of creating a supportive learning environment as a foundation for developing students' social, emotional, and character skills. They employed various strategies to establish supportive, positive, and inclusive classrooms where students felt safe to take risks and learn from their mistakes. Teachers created a calm and welcoming atmosphere by minimizing distractions and building rapport, which align with CASEL's relationship skills and self-awareness competencies. These competencies that teachers infuse in their programs help students learn to connect, communicate, and reflect in a safe and structured environment (Ee & Cheng, 2013; Elias & Weissberg, 2000).

In addition to conducive environments, teachers shared how they intentionally integrated SECD in their programs in ways that align with CASEL competencies and the Kansas SECD standards. They designed meaningful learning experiences by using group work with real-world applications to foster collaboration. Specifically, teachers explained how they use break-out boxes, role-playing, SMART goals, and project-based learning to encourage self-management, responsible decision-making, and goal setting, which are central tenets to the CASEL and Kansas SECD frameworks (CASEL, n.d.; KSDE, 2018).

Additionally, these SBAE teachers empowered students through responsibility by setting and communicating clear expectations, encouraging self-advocacy, and prompting students to take ownership of their actions and learning. They created opportunities for students to experience consequences in supportive ways, such as allowing and teaching responsible self-phone use in class, to develop independence and accountability. These practices support CASEL's (n.d.) responsible decision-making and accountability.

Teachers perceived themselves not only as instructors but also as mentors and role models for students' development. They modeled professionalism through attire and room decor, were emotionally honest with their students, demonstrated self-care, and maintained an open-door policy to establish support. Their involvement in their communities and open communication fostered a culture of trust and high expectations. This modeling supports Maslow's (1943) emphasis on psychological needs as precursors for personal growth and aligns with CASEL's (n.d.) holistic approach to SEL, reinforcing students' self-awareness and providing examples of positive behaviors for both personal and professional growth.

Creating a Supportive and Relational Learning Environment Teachers consistently prioritized creating a supportive and relational learning environment where students felt safe to learn, grow, and even make mistakes, which aligns with Maslow's theory suggesting that students' ability to thrive intellectually and emotionally is dependent upon having their physiological, safety, and belonging needs fulfilled first (Maslow, 1943). The SBAE teachers' intentional focus on classroom culture helps satisfy these foundational needs, thus enabling higher levels of student engagement and development. This foundation was built through clear expectations, consistent modeling of desired behaviors, and the intentional fostering of a positive classroom culture characterized by respect, community, and strong teacher-student rapport. They prioritize classroom culture through thoughtful classroom design, building relationships, fostering a sense of community, and modeling ethical principles. Savannah explained that she sets a positive tone for her classes by greeting students daily when they enter her room and engaging them in discussion questions at the beginning of class. Craig echoed Savannah and shared that he cultivates a learning community in his courses by setting expectations for

collaboration. Lester and Robin use physical proximity and humor to build rapport with their students and aid in positive classroom environments.

Intentional Integration of Social, Emotional, and Character Development in Agricultural Education To integrate interpersonal communication and collaboration, teachers in this study emphasized developing communication skills, fostering teamwork, and applying learning to real-world experiences. They incorporated structured activities such as group projects, presentations, and discussions to enhance both written and oral communication abilities. Strategies included gradually building students' confidence by speaking in smaller groups and providing opportunities for practice and feedback. Technology like Google Classroom stream was also utilized to facilitate discussions and peer feedback.

Intentional grouping strategies were employed to optimize student learning and collaboration. Teachers considered student dynamics and used strategic grouping to enhance teamwork and classroom management. Extracurricular organizations, like FFA, provided means for peer learning, problem-solving, and increased student involvement through committee work. By creating supportive environments with structured activities and group projects, teachers aimed to build students' confidence in their communication and collaboration skills.

Furthermore, teachers actively promoted students' social development through civic and community engagement. They emphasized active participation, fostered awareness of community needs, and integrated service into extracurricular activities. Teachers intentionally sought meaningful service projects that addressed local issues and exposed students to civic values and local governance. Activities such as community mapping were also used to help students understand their community's landscape and their potential role within it.

Empowering Student Responsibility A central strategy employed by teachers to cultivate students' social, emotional, and character skills was empowering them through responsibility. This focus on fostering independence, ownership, and self-advocacy aligns with Maslow's (1943) higher-order needs of esteem and self-actualization, as students are given opportunities to develop competence and achieve their full potential. By providing students with independence, encouraging them to navigate challenges, and fostering accountability for their actions, educators nurtured essential life skills and a sense of ownership. Opportunities for collaboration and leadership, often within organizations like FFA, further reinforced this empowerment, building confidence and preparing students for active community engagement. Teachers consistently modeled expected behaviors and clear communication of expectations to promote character development, ethical decision-making, a positive classroom culture, and strong problem-solving skills. Some teachers, for instance, emphasized the establishment and reinforcement of clear and consistent rules to ensure student understanding and internalization of expectations.

To foster responsibility, accountability, and decision-making, teacher participants emphasized providing students with opportunities for independence. By granting students a degree of autonomy and allowing them to experience the natural consequences of their choices within a supportive environment, teachers aimed to cultivate self-regulation and responsible behavior, meeting students' needs for esteem and ultimately moving them closer to self-actualization (Maslow, 1943).

Teachers in this study actively fostered problem-solving skills through student-centered and experiential learning activities that emphasized collaboration, conflict resolution, and the practical application of knowledge. Collaborative learning environments were frequently

employed, allowing students to learn from each other's perspectives and work collectively to overcome challenges. Curricula that incorporated structured problem-solving processes and analytical questioning were also seen as valuable tools for developing these essential skills.

To cultivate problem-solving skills through real-world applications, teachers often create authentic scenarios that require students to apply their knowledge in practical contexts. For instance, educators may simulate professional situations, such as responding to client inquiries in a business setting or analyzing workplace incidents to determine causes and develop solutions. These experiences encourage students to think critically, make informed decisions, and develop the adaptability necessary to navigate complex, real-world challenges.

Modeling for Student Development Educators in this study actively build students' personal development skills by modeling and integrating self-awareness, self-management, goal setting, and career preparation. They emphasized providing students with strategies for emotional regulation, such as taking breaks or using introspective questioning. Teachers also modeled self-awareness by openly sharing their feelings and demonstrated self-care through prioritizing personal well-being. Building rapport was seen as crucial for creating a safe space for students to express their emotions. By demonstrating these skills, teachers provide a pathway for students to achieve Maslow's (1943) self-actualization, the highest level of need.

Goal setting and career preparation were integrated through direct instruction and reflective activities. Teachers focused on the benefits of setting clear and achievable goals, often using frameworks like SMART goals. They encouraged students to write down their goals and regularly review their progress. Career planning was emphasized through modeling professionalism in attire and behavior, guiding career exploration, and developing essential

workplace skills such as communication and safety awareness. Extracurricular organizations like FFA were utilized to reinforce professionalism and responsibility.

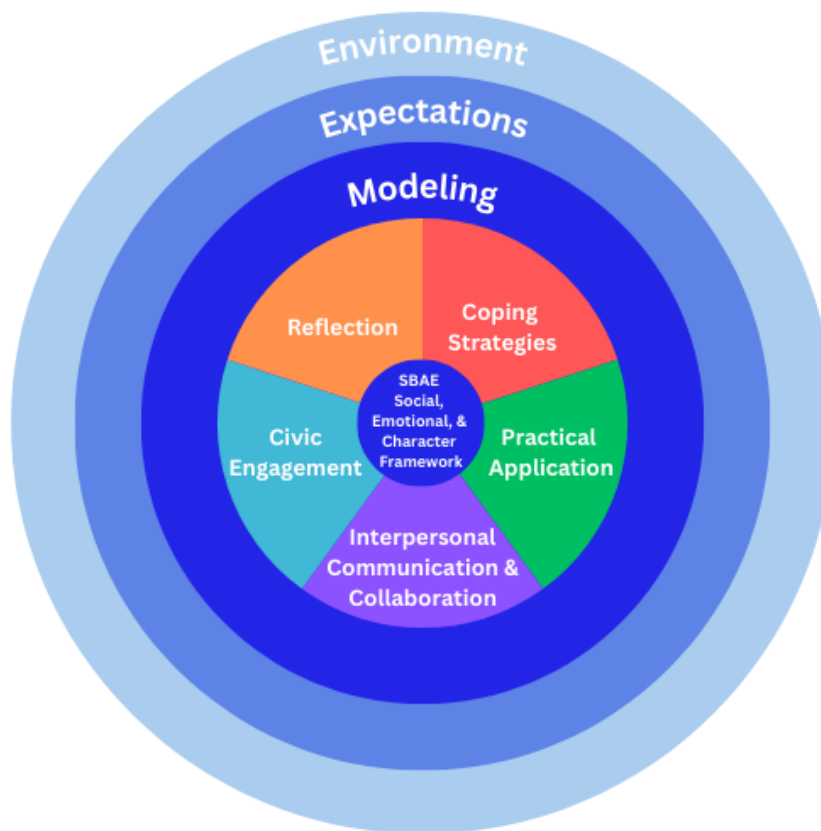
Social development was cultivated through various strategies that integrated social awareness, empathy, interpersonal communication, collaboration, and civic engagement. Teachers explicitly fostered respectful interactions and used experiential learning opportunities to broaden students' perspectives on social issues. Direct lessons and discussions on empathy were also incorporated. Furthermore, community service activities organized through extracurricular chapters provided practical experiences for students to develop social responsibility and compassion.

The Kansas SBAE teachers in this study employ diverse strategies to incorporate social, emotional, and character development into their classrooms and FFA chapters. They model expected behaviors, foster positive classroom environments, and engage students in real-world problem-solving to create meaningful learning experiences to promote character growth. Additionally, they emphasize personal development through self-awareness, self-management, goal setting, and career preparation while cultivating social skills and awareness through communication, collaboration, and civic engagement. These intentional strategies prepare students for academic and career success and support their mental health by promoting self-regulation, resilience, and a sense of belonging. Teachers play a crucial role in fostering well-being by creating safe spaces for students to express emotions, manage stress, and develop positive relationships. Ultimately, integrating these developmental skills in SBAE programs strengthens student growth, ensuring they are prepared to contribute to their communities and future careers.

Contributions to Theory

This study provides contextualization and practical use of the CASEL framework (CASEL, n.d.). The results highlight how the unique SBAE three-component model provides opportunities to not only foster CASEL's five core competencies but also support students' needs as outlined by Maslow (1943). The research demonstrates how these competencies are integrated into SBAE and adds practical understanding to the more general descriptions within the CASEL framework. Further, the study provides evidence of how teachers perceive their role in fostering these competencies and the specific strategies they use to integrate them in their programs (Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3
SBAE Connection to CASEL.



By analyzing perceptions and practices, this study links CASEL's framework to real-world and educational settings. The research findings suggest that SBAE emphasizes certain areas of the CASEL framework in unique ways. For example, there was a strong emphasis on responsibility and collaboration with agricultural education courses and FFA activities, highlighting ways teachers can develop responsible decision-making and relationship skills that may differ in other subject areas. The SBAE teachers in this study relied heavily on reflection and coping strategies to promote self-awareness and self-management. They valued real-world application in developing students' decision-making and problem-solving skills and placed emphasis on interpersonal communication, collaboration, and community involvement to develop relationships and social awareness. Ultimately, teachers support the CASEL framework and Kansas SECD standards through modeling and communicating clear expectations and creating a positive environment.

Implications

This research highlights the integral role of Kansas SBAE teachers in fostering social, emotional, and character development. Teachers in this study view themselves not only as educators but also as mentors who shape students' personal growth beyond agricultural content. The multifaceted nature of SBAE, including classroom and laboratory instruction, FFA involvement, and Supervised Agricultural Experiences, provides a unique framework for integrating social, emotional, and character development into daily instruction (Akers et al., 2004; Marlatt et al., 2003). The three-component model of agricultural education offers continuous, hands-on opportunities for students to develop interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, reinforcing emotional intelligence and ethical decision-making (Akers et al., 2002; Rose et al., 2016). This study highlights how SBAE teachers incorporate experiential and student-centered

learning to cultivate problem-solving abilities, leadership, and resilience, demonstrating that SBAE programs uniquely equip students with essential life skills for career and personal success.

Kansas SBAE teachers in this study recognize the importance of modeling in developing students' social, emotional, and character skills. They realize their behaviors, attitudes, and interactions are influential examples for students. Teachers demonstrate ethical decision-making, self-awareness, self-management, and relationships through modeling, supporting Schonert-Reichl (2017) stating teachers must build their own social and emotional competence to shape relationships with students. The Agricultural Education Three-Component Model allows teachers to engage with students across multiple contexts, which creates an environment where they can consistently model and demonstrate social, emotional, and character development principles (Akers et al., 2004). Given the engagement with students, SBAE teachers often form close relationships, allowing them to establish and reinforce positive behaviors and provide guidance, support, and mentorship (Akers et al., 2004).

Given their influence through modeling, SBAE teachers should be intentional in their approach and recognize that their interactions contribute to student social, emotional, and character development. Teachers further strengthen student growth by integrating these elements into their classrooms and FFA chapters. This research highlights the ability of SBAE teachers to foster essential skills through the Three-Component Model and Agricultural Education (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019). Findings suggest that SBAE teachers engage in practices that promote social, emotional, and character development and play a critical role in preparing students for personal and career success (Akers et al., 2004; Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

These findings highlight the role teacher educators play in preparing pre-service SBAE teachers to integrate social, emotional, and character development into their teaching practices

(Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019; Murano et al., 2019). This research suggests that embedding these elements within teacher preparation programs can help future SBAE teachers recognize their role in modeling positive behaviors, building positive relationships, and creating supportive and welcoming learning environments (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019; Ee & Cheng, 2013; Murano et al., 2019). Furthermore, integrating student social, emotional, and character needs with academic instruction highlights the importance of mentorship in supporting pre-service SBAE teachers (Ee & Cheng, 2013).

Addressing the challenges and barriers to implementing social, emotional, and character development in SBAE programs is essential for increasing its impact (Ee & Cheng, 2013; Elias & Weissberg, 2000; Mahoney et al., 2021). The demands of advising an FFA chapter, in addition to teaching and a lack of training, can make it difficult for SBAE teachers to integrate social, emotional, and character development into their programs (Ee & Cheng, 2013). School administration and professional organizations can support SBAE teachers by providing professional development and resources (Ee & Cheng, 2013; Greenberg, 2023). Additionally, fostering partnerships between schools, educators, and community stakeholders can support the importance of social, emotional, and character development for student success.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Research

Further qualitative and quantitative research should be conducted to measure the impact of SBAE teachers' social, emotional, and character development practices on student outcomes. Educators who integrate social and emotional competencies into their existing curriculum by using effective communication, high expectations, and classroom structure can enhance students' emotional management, goal-setting abilities, relationship, decision-making, and interpersonal

and intrapersonal skills (Adelman & Taylor, 2010; Bloodworth et al., 2007; Yopp et al., 2007). Expanding research in this area would allow for a deeper understanding of which SECD practices are most effective in an SBAE setting and how they contribute to students' long-term professional and personal success.

Future qualitative research exploring the long-term effects of SECD strategies employed by Kansas SBAE teachers would offer insight into how teachers' approaches evolve and how students' social, emotional, and character development advances throughout their time in agricultural education programs. Longitudinal studies tracking students throughout high school and beyond would provide perspective on the lasting impact of the SECD practices used in SBAE programs. This kind of long-term research aligns with the need to understand if observed growth in social, emotional, and character competence is sustained over time (Shapiro et al., 2024). Longitudinal studies would also examine how teachers' beliefs and instructional strategies evolve throughout their careers and what might influence changes in their practices and perspectives. Future studies should broadly analyze the relationship between SECD and student outcomes which would contribute to the understanding of the lasting impact of SECD interventions (Shapiro et al., 2024).

It is further recommended to improve the case study protocol to better elicit responses from teachers that would highlight how they support student mental health and social and emotional competencies. The protocol used in this study was adapted from the CASEL *School-based Staff Survey on Schoolwide SEL Implementation* tool (CASEL, 2021). The survey is distributed to current teachers to gather the frequency of which teachers feel they receive support for SEL and integrate SEL competencies in their teaching practices. While the survey is useful for gathering quantitative data, it was less effective in capturing qualitative insights. To gain

even richer and more insightful data about how SBAE teachers support student mental health and social and character skills in future studies, it would be beneficial to create a space where teachers feel comfortable sharing openly about sensitive topics. Future research should incorporate multiple engagement opportunities with participants. Building a relationship centered around SECD and mental health would foster trust and allow for more candid responses. I also recommend that future participants complete the *School-based Staff Survey on Schoolwide SEL Implementation* tool (CASEL, 2021) prior to case study interviews to build a more comprehensive understanding of how teachers perceive and implement SECD,

Additionally, research investigating how school culture, community values, and regional factors influence SECD could provide further insight into the impact that SECD has on students (Adelman & Taylor, 2010; Zins et al., 2007). Community involvement and collaboration with schools play a critical role in developing students' social, emotional, and character skills (Hughes et al., 2025; Strom 2002). Future studies would be beneficial to explore how rural, suburban, and urban SBAE programs differ in their SECD implementation strategies, as well as the influence community partnerships have on students' character development. Understanding these factors could lead to more tailored professional development programs for SBAE teachers that align with their specific school environment and community expectations.

While this study focused on teachers' perceptions, future research examining students' perspectives of their teachers' practices and strategies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of SECD. Student perceptions are critical to school climate and inform effective practices (Nickerson et al., 2019). Nickerson et al. (2019) found that students' perceptions of factors like bullying and school climate improved as a result of their teachers' SEL strategies. How students perceive their relationships with their teachers is also a valuable

tool for educators to consider in delivering social, emotional, and character development strategies (Brass et al., 2024; Scales et al., 2019). Gaining student feedback through interviews and focus groups would provide a more comprehensive view of the effectiveness of SECD and help educators improve their approaches to meeting student needs. Additionally, quantitative surveys could be utilized to measure students' self-reported growth in social, emotional, and character competencies.

Considering the diverse range of options for student involvement in SBAE, it is further recommended to conduct research that examines the impact of specific FFA or SBAE programming. A deeper investigation into the characteristics that are enhanced through student participation would allow researchers and educators to understand the most impactful areas. Such research could explore which FFA activities, such as career or leadership development events, leadership conferences, or officer roles, most effectively support student growth. Additionally, examining different types of Supervised Agricultural Experiences may reveal how different forms of experiential learning contribute to personal responsibility, problem solving, goal setting, and perseverance. Understanding these connections could help educators intentionally design and integrate opportunities that align with social, emotional, and character development.

Finally, it is recommended to investigate social, emotional, and character development curriculum that could be effective in SBAE. It would be beneficial to explore a curriculum designed for SBAE teachers to provide guidance on integrating SECD through the three-component model. Previous curricula like LifeKnowledge, a series of lesson plans and activities created by the National FFA Organization for agricultural education teachers to develop students' leadership, communication, teamwork, and personal development skills (National FFA

Organization, n.d.), could be evaluated to determine its alignment with CASEL's five principles. With the updates or the development of new curricula, training should be developed and provided to support SBAE teachers in their implementation.

Recommendations for Practice

Several recommendations for practice can be made from this research, beginning in teacher preparation programs. To strengthen pre-service teachers' confidence and fluency in SECD, teacher educators should highlight how foundational teaching skills like building relationships, creating safe and supportive environments, effective classroom management, modeling, and student-centered learning inherently foster SECD (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). It is further recommended that teacher educators focus on incorporating more targeted strategies within teacher preparation programs (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019). This may include embedding SECD into coursework through reflective journals that prompt students to observe how teachers accommodate students' basic needs and SECD practices in their field experiences, as well as incorporating experiential learning activities such as role-playing and case studies that simulate student behavior within an SECD framework.

Teacher preparation also prepares future teachers to implement and model SECD by equipping them with tools to support both their students and their own well-being. Donahue-Keegan et al. (2019) recommend incorporating mindfulness activities in teacher education. Practicing mindfulness can help pre-service teachers maintain present-moment awareness and non-judgmental acceptance of their feelings and thoughts (Jazaieri, 2017). By incorporating mindfulness activities like breathing practices in teacher preparation courses, teacher educators can prepare future teachers to develop their own social-emotional stamina (Donahue-Keegan et al., 2019). Understanding how pre-service teachers perceive SECD and how these experiences

shape their own development can enhance the overall effectiveness of SECD-focused teacher preparation.

Furthermore, current SBAE teachers are encouraged to implement recommended strategies to support students' basic needs and develop their social, emotional, and character skills. While every teacher has unique strengths and teaching methods, teachers must incorporate SECD into daily practices (Eck et al., 2019; Mahoney et al., 2021). Teachers should enhance good teaching practices to maximize their SECD impact. Several social, emotional, and character skills can be developed by intentionally establishing a positive classroom environment where students feel physically, emotionally, and psychologically safe, foundational needs that align with Maslow's Hierarchy and are engaged and empowered in learning and conducting meaningful work (CASEL, n.d.; Maslow, 1943). Clearly established routines, like consistent classroom rules and procedures that are modeled and frequently revisited assist in creating safe environments and improve classroom management (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018).

Positive classroom environments also include collaboration among students where they build their interpersonal skills (Bonny et al., 2000; CDC, n.d.; Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2021; Zins et al., 2017). Fostering problem-solving and creating situations where students rely on one another can improve teamwork, empathy, and communication skills (CASEL, n.d.). In addition to developing interpersonal skills, group work and collaboration can develop social awareness and empathy. Teachers should support positive and respectful interactions among students by thoughtfully planning groups where students feel comfortable engaging in discussion and serving as allies for each other (CASEL, n.d.).

Additionally, providing students diverse experiences like using multicultural examples, guest

speakers, field trips, and community projects can develop students' empathy for others (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018).

Beyond fostering collaboration, acknowledging students' unique identities and using inclusive teaching practices are tenets of effective teaching that contribute to a student's sense of belonging and are vital for positive and inclusive classroom environments (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020; Eck et al., 2019). However, teachers often employ teaching strategies that exacerbate social exclusion, like competitions that are inherently isolating and can unintentionally negatively impact a student's learning and social and emotional competence (Teachers Institute, n.d.).

One such instructional approach that merits careful consideration is competition, commonly used in SBAE, often to support Career Development Events and Leadership Development Events (Jones & Edwards, 2019). While healthy competition can positively influence a student's performance goals or learning motivation (Attle & Baker, 2007), unhealthy competition may cause students to refrain from participation (Teaching Institute, n.d.). Unhealthy competition in teaching and learning practices can create a mindset where students only learn information for a test rather than deep learning and knowledge retention (Teaching Institute, n.d.). Teachers aiming to incorporate healthy competition in their classes should use cooperation-competition that fuses cooperative learning with the motivational aspect of competition in which students strive for positive individual and team outcomes (Attle & Baker, 2007). Cooperative learning strategies not only prevent the pitfalls of isolation and discouragement, but also encourage deeper learning (Attle & Baker, 2007; Owens & Barnes, 1982; Teaching Institute, n.d.).

In addition to social and collaborative skills, personal development skills such as self-awareness and self-management are essential competencies crucial for individual student growth that teachers should promote in their classrooms and programs (Durlak et al., 2011; Durlak et al., 2022). It is recommended that teachers model self-awareness and self-management by acknowledging their own emotions and reflecting on their actions (Progress Learning, n.d.). Teachers can also promote these critical personal development skills by incorporating activities that involve reflection through writing and exploring topics of interest (CASEL, n.d.). These strategies support students in developing emotional insight, managing stress, and controlling impulses, which are key components of well-being and success (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018).

To maximize the impact of social and emotional learning, school personnel need opportunities to develop their own skills, aligning with Maslow's (1943) assertion that, like students, adults must have their psychological and growth needs supported to reach their full potential as educators. Therefore, providing teachers with professional development in SECD is essential (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Durlak et al., 2011). Schools and educational organizations should provide training and support for SECD programs and integration practices that focus on what it is, why it is essential, and how it connects and strengthens academic skills (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016). Teachers should also be trained in finding curriculum-specific resources that align with specific subject areas. They should also be given professional learning community time to tailor required lessons and discuss and evaluate the effectiveness of their practices with other teachers (Kendziora & Yoder, 2016).

Families are critical for supporting students' social and emotional development outside of school. SBAE programs should intentionally include families in FFA events, SAE showcases, or

classroom celebrations to align values between school and home and create a consistent support network. Family engagement also reinforces cultural relevance and helps tailor SECD efforts to reflect the community's unique needs and strengths (Greenberg, 2023).

Given the role communities can play in developing student social, emotional, and character skills (Strom, 2002), community members, such as agricultural business professionals, alumni, and local leaders, can serve as mentors and role models, sharing real-world experiences highlighting ethical decision-making, perseverance, teamwork, and empathy. Involving these individuals in SAEs or guest speaking roles connects students to broader social networks, reinforcing positive behaviors and community values (Elias & Weissberg, 2000).

Summary

Educators have the challenging and critical role of teaching content while developing students' social, emotional, and character competencies (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020). SBAE teachers have a unique opportunity to integrate these skills through experiential learning and leadership experiences within the three-component model (Akers et al., 2004; Rose et al., 2016). Further research to examine the best practices and strategies is needed to develop professional development and training for teachers. The SBAE teachers in this study shared various methods for addressing and integrating interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. However, additional support and resources would enhance their confidence in incorporating social, emotional, and character competencies into their classes and programs. By identifying effective approaches and providing targeted support, SBAE teachers can be better equipped to foster well-rounded, resilient, and socially responsible students.

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Appendix A - IRB Confirmation



Office of Research Integrity,
Compliance and Security

TO: Gaea Hock
Communications & Ag Education
Manhattan, KS 66506

Proposal Number: IRB-12447

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 11/01/2024

RE: Proposal Entitled, "Investigating the Social, Emotional, and Character Development Practices and Perceptions of School-Based Agricultural Education Teachers."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects / Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Kansas State University has reviewed the proposal identified above and has determined that it is EXEMPT from further IRB review. This exemption applies only to the proposal - as written - and currently on file with the IRB. Any change potentially affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation and may disqualify the proposal from exemption.

Based upon information provided to the IRB, this activity is exempt under the criteria set forth in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, **45 CFR §104(d), category:Exempt Category 2 Subsection ii.**

Certain research is exempt from the requirements of HHS/OHRP regulations. A determination that research is exempt does not imply that investigators have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research; it means only that the regulatory requirements related to IRB review, informed consent, and assurance of compliance do not apply to the research.

Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, the University Research Compliance Office, and if the subjects are KSU students, to the Director of the Student Health Center.

Electronically signed by Lisa Rubin on 11/02/2024 6:32 PM ET

Appendix B - IRB Modification Confirmation



Office of Research Integrity,
Compliance and Security

TO: Gaea Hock
Communications & Ag Education
Manhattan, KS 66506

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 12/18/2024

RE: Proposal #IRB-12447, entitled "Investigating the Social, Emotional, and Character Development Practices and Perceptions of School-Based Agricultural Education Teachers."

MODIFICATION OF IRB PROTOCOL #IRB-12447, ENTITLED, "Investigating the Social, Emotional, and Character Development Practices and Perceptions of School-Based Agricultural Education Teachers"

EXPIRATION DATE: Exempt

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (IRB) has reviewed and approved the request identified above as a modification of a previously approved protocol. **Please note that the original expiration remains the same.**

All approved IRB protocols are subject to continuing review at least annually, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced in-progress reviews may also be performed during the course of this approval period by a member of the University Research Compliance Office staff. Unanticipated adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB, and / or the URCO

It is important that your human subjects activity is consistent with submissions to funding / contract entities. It is your responsibility to initiate notification procedures to any funding / contract entity of any changes in your activity that affects the use of human subjects.

Electronically signed by Heath Ritter on 12/18/2024 3:46 PM ET

Appendix C - Kansas SECD Practices and Perceptions Survey

Kansas Social, Emotional, and Character Development Practices and Perceptions

Intro The purpose of this brief survey is to explore social, emotional, and character development in agricultural education programs and FFA chapters. Through social, emotional, and character development (SECD), students practice good citizenship as respectful, responsible, empathetic, and ethical individuals. SECD is outlined as good citizenship, making healthy decisions, practicing personal safety, understanding risk prevention, promoting a positive school culture, problem solving effectively, and valuing excellence. Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefit. Your responses will be kept confidential. No personally identifiable information will be associated with your responses. Your information will not be distributed for future research. If you have any questions, please contact me, KaCee James (kaceet@ksu.edu) or principal investigator, Gaea Hock (ghock@ksu.edu). For questions about your rights as a subject or about injuries caused by this research, contact the Kansas State University Research Compliance Office (URCO) at 532-224 or Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, KSU, Manhattan, KS.

Q0-1 Do you consent to participate in this study? Please indicate below.

- ☐ Yes, I consent to participate in this study.
- ☐ No, I do not consent to participate in this study.

Skip To: Q02 If Do you consent to participate in this study? Please indicate below. = Yes, I consent to participate in this study.

Skip To: End of Survey If Do you consent to participate in this study? Please indicate below. = No, I do not consent to participate in this study.

Q02 Do you currently teach agricultural education in Kansas?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Skip To: End of Survey If Do you currently teach agricultural education in Kansas? = No

Page Break

Q1 Do you teach specific social, emotional, and character development (SECD) lessons, either within or outside your agriculture courses?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Page Break

Q2 The following questions are about your delivery of social, emotional, and character development in your school.

Display this question:

If Do you teach specific social, emotional, and character development (SECD) lessons, either within... = Yes

Q2-1 Which best describes the type of SECD lessons you teach? (Select all that apply.)

- ☐ Pre-made lessons from a program purchased or implemented by my school
- ☐ Pre-made lessons I found
- ☐ Lessons I created
- ☐ Combination of lessons I created and found

Display this question:

If Do you teach specific social, emotional, and character development (SECD) lessons, either within... = Yes

Q2-2 During which class(es) do you teach SECD lessons? (Select all that apply.)

☐

Regular agriculture courses

☐

Advisory/seminar period

☐

Other (explain) _____

Display this question:

If Do you teach specific social, emotional, and character development (SECD) lessons, either within... = Yes

Q2-3 How often do you teach SECD lessons?

☐

More than once per week

☐

Once per week

☐

Every other week

☐

Once per month

☐

Once per semester

☐

Other (describe) _____

Page Break

Q3 The following questions will assess your attitude toward the role and impact of social, emotional, and character development in education.

Q3-1 Identify your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
It is important to promote SECD in my teaching practices.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Social, emotional, and character competence is related to students' academic success.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Social, emotional, and character is related to students' civic engagement.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Social, emotional, and character competence is related to students' career preparation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
SECD should be taught in the classroom.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Display this question:

If Do you teach specific social, emotional, and character development (SECD) lessons, either within... = Yes

Q3-2 Based on the SECD lessons you have taught, consider the following questions:

	Always	Most of the Time	Some of the time	Hardly Ever	Never
Students have a positive attitude toward social, emotional, and character learning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Students are engaged in the lessons.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

End of Block: Default Question Block

Start of Block: SECD Instruction

Q4 The following questions are about your experiences and perceptions of social, emotional, and character development in your school.

Q4-1 Identify your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I act on opportunities for my students to learn or practice SECD competencies,.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I integrate SECD into my academic lesson plans .	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I integrate real-world experiences into my academic lesson plans.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I integrate both real-world application and social emotional and character development into my academic lesson plans.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Page Break

Q5 The following questions will explore school-based supports for promoting social, emotional, and character development.

Q5-1 Identify your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I have participated in professional development opportunities that offer strategies for promoting SECD in the classroom and school community.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My administrators actively encourage SECD by providing staff with resources, training, and a supportive school culture.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My school building culture fosters collaboration and a shared responsibility for advancing SECD among students and staff.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

My **school district** offers consistent support and initiatives aimed at strengthening SECD across all schools.

☐☐☐☐☐

I have access to **mentors** who guide me in integrating SECD practices into my teaching and professional development.

☐☐☐☐☐

My **teacher education program** provided me with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively implement SECD in my teaching practice.

☐☐☐☐☐

Q6 The following questions explore the levels of support and collaboration for implementing social, emotional, and character development.

Q6-1 Identify your level of agreement with each of the following statements.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My school provides me with the necessary support on how to best implement social, emotional, and character development in the classroom.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I receive regular feedback from administrators or instructional coaches on how to improve my SECD practices.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My school provides opportunities for collaborative planning sessions focused on SECD strategies.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers in my school are encouraged to share best practices for implementing SECD in their classrooms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Interdisciplinary teams in my school work together to monitor students' social, emotional, and character growth.



Page Break

Page Break

Q6-2 Identify the frequency of which you partner with families at your school.

	Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Once per semester	Once per year	Never
I communicate with my students' families as a way to build positive relationships.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I involve my students' families in meaningful decision making.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How often do you seek input from families about how to best meet their students' social, emotional, and character needs?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Page Break

Q7 Which FFA activities do you believe most effectively promote SECD among students?
(Select all that apply.)

- ☐ Leadership conferences (e.g. National FFA Convention, State leadership conference)
- ☐ Career Development Events (CDE)
- ☐ Leadership Development Events (LDE)
- ☐ Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE)
- ☐ Chapter meetings
- ☐ Community service or Service learning projects
- ☐ Officer training program
- ☐ Other _____

Q8 The following questions are specifically related to SECD in the context of agricultural education and FFA.

Q8-1 Which SECD skills do you believe students develop most through their participation in FFA? (Select all that apply.)

- ☐ Leadership
- ☐ Teamwork and collaboration
- ☐ Public speaking and communication
- ☐ Problem-solving and critical thinking
- ☐ Self-awareness and self-regulation
- ☐ Empathy and understanding of others
- ☐ Other _____

Page Break

Q9 How do you assess the effectiveness of FFA activities in promoting SECD? (Select all that apply.)

- ☐ Observation of student behavior and attitudes
- ☐ Student reflections/journals
- ☐ Feedback from students
- ☐ Performance in CDEs, LDEs, or leadership roles
- ☐ Other _____

Q10 What challenges do you face when trying to emphasize SECD in agricultural education and FFA activities? (Select all that apply.)

- ☐ Balancing SECD with other FFA objectives
- ☐ Limited time during FFA events
- ☐ Lack of specific SECD training or resources
- ☐ Student focus on competition over character development
- ☐ Difficulty in measuring SECD outcomes
- ☐ I do not try to emphasize SECD in FFA activities
- ☐ Other _____

Page Break

Q11 In your experience, how does participation in FFA and agricultural education impact students' social, emotional, and character growth?

- ☐ Significantly positive
 - ☐ Moderately positive
 - ☐ Neither positive or negative
 - ☐ Moderately negative
 - ☐ Significantly negative
-

Q13 How many years have you taught agricultural education (including this year)?

Q14 What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary / third gender
- ☐ Prefer not to say

Q15 What size of school do you currently teach in?

☐ 1A

☐ 2A

☐ 3A

☐ 4A

☐ 5A

☐ 6A

Q16 Which of the following best describes your type of teaching licensure?

☐ Traditionally certified (certified through post-secondary agricultural education program)

☐ Alternatively certified (obtained certificate after graduating with a post-secondary degree other than agricultural education)

☐ Emergency substitute (you do not hold a teaching certificate other than emergency substitute license)

☐ Originally certified in other content area and added agriculture endorsement (you were certified in another discipline prior to obtaining agriculture certification)

☐ Other

Page Break

End of Block: SECD Instruction

Start of Block: Block 2

Q17-0 Thank you for completing this survey. Your responses are valuable in helping us understand the experiences and perceptions of secondary agricultural education teachers regarding social, emotional, and character development. Your aggregate data will remain confidential. To gain deeper insights, we would like to invite any interested participants to take part in a follow-up interview. This interview will provide an opportunity to discuss your experiences and perspectives in more detail. The interview will be conducted at a time convenient for you and can be done via phone, video call, or in person. If you are interested in participating in a follow-up interview, your contact information will remain separate from your survey responses. Interviews will be scheduled for January 2025. Correspondence will be sent to those selected for the interviews beginning in December. If you do not wish to participate in an interview, selecting "No" will end the survey. If you select "Yes" you will be directed to a new page to collect contact information.

Q17-1 Are you willing to participate in a follow-up interview relating to SECD in agricultural education? If you select "yes", you will be directed to a page to provide consent by providing your name and email. If you select "no", you will be directed to the end of the survey.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Skip To: End of Survey If Are you willing to participate in a follow-up interview relating to SECD in agricultural educatio... = No

Page Break

Q17-2 Thank you for your interest in participating in the qualitative portion of this study. Please indicate your consent to participate in a follow-up interview by providing your preferred contact information below:

☐ First and Last Name _____

☐ Email _____

☐ Phone _____

☐ School _____

End of Block: Block 2

Appendix D - Case Study Interview Recruitment Email

Greetings Ag Teachers -

I hope this email finds you well as the fall semester comes to a close. As you may recall, I am conducting research on social, emotional, and character development (SECD) in Kansas agricultural education as part of my doctoral studies at Kansas State University. Starting in January, I will begin case study interviews to gather insights into this important topic.

In the survey you completed last month, you indicated an interest in participating in these interviews. After reviewing the survey results, I believe your perspective makes you great candidate for the study.

If you are still interested, please reply to this email to confirm your participation by December 20. Once I hear from you, I will follow up with a link to a Doodle poll to schedule a time for your interview. Should you elect to participate in the interviews, you will be asked to submit supporting documents to further demonstrate how you promote and foster social, emotional, and character development in your program. Documents may include pictures of your classroom or learning environment, lesson plans or teaching materials, samples of letters or communication, etc. These documents will be submitted to a protected Qualtrics form and will only be seen by me, the researcher.

Thank you for considering this opportunity to contribute to this research. If you have any questions or need further information, please don't hesitate to contact me by email or phone.
Sincerely,

KaCee James

Graduate Teaching Assistant

Department of Communications and Agricultural Education

Kansas State University

kaceet@ksu.edu

785-418-2618

Appendix E - Case Study Interview Protocol

Beginning of Interview

Hello, thank you for your participation in my study. As you may be aware, Kansas adopted the state K-12 social, emotional, and character development standards in 2012. Many schools utilize a set curriculum to teach the standards. This study is looking at and trying to gain an understanding of the practices that Kansas SBAE teachers use in their classrooms and programs to foster and teach social, emotional, and character development.

Your participation will be completely confidential, I will not use your name, school district, or program/chapter name. By continuing with this interview, you are giving your consent to use the information from this recorded interview. The audio and video will be recorded during the interview to help with the data analysis after the interview. This recording will be kept on a password-protected computer and cloud for two years after project completion. The lead project investigator and I will be the only individuals with access to this data. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw your participation at any point without penalty or loss of benefit. Your information will not be distributed for future research. Constant comparative coding will be used to discuss the results from your program/chapter.

By exploring the practices of teachers that correlate with the social, emotional, and character development standards, I will be better equipped to explain how effective school-based agricultural education teachers foster student self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. This study will help in the development of future teacher professional development.

If you have any questions, please contact me, KaCee James (kaceet@ksu.edu) or principal investigator, Gaea Hock (ghock@ksu.edu). For questions about your rights as a subject or about

injuries caused by this research, contact the Kansas State University Research Compliance Office (URCO) at 532-224 or Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, KSU, Manhattan, KS.

Ask Interview Questions

Interpersonal Skills

1. How do you help students develop effective communication skills?
2. What opportunities or strategies do you provide students to practice teamwork and collaboration with peers?
3. What are some ways that you teach your students about their civic responsibilities?
4. How do you encourage students to cultivate empathy in their interactions with others?
5. How do you teach students to practice their problem-solving skills?
6. What strategies do you use to help students resolve conflicts?

Intrapersonal Skills

7. Describe how you help students in setting academic or personal goals.
8. How do you address student mistakes?
9. How do you help students examine factors that may negatively affect their success?
10. How do you help students self-regulate their behavior or emotions?
11. How do you encourage students to be responsible for their learning and academic progress?
12. How do you teach or promote self-care?
13. Could you explain how you model professionalism?

End of Interview

I appreciate your willingness to participate in my study. Your results will provide valuable information for us to better understand how ag teachers incorporate and foster positive social, emotional, and character development in their classrooms and programs. I look forward to compiling the results and sharing the information with you. I may reach out to you after transcribing our interview if I have any questions or need clarifying information.

Thank you again!

Appendix F - Case Study Interview Debrief Statement

Thank you for participating in *an investigation of Kansas School-Based Agricultural Education (SBAE) Teacher's perceptions of the social, emotional, and character development in their programs and classrooms* research study. Results will be evaluated for my dissertation and shared with interested groups via research papers and/or posters. Once data has been analyzed and formatted into a research report, an email containing results will be sent to all participants who completed an interview. Thank you for your time and effort and we look forward to sharing results with you soon.

If you have any questions, please contact me, KaCee James (kaceet@ksu.edu) or Gaea Hock (ghock@ksu.edu). For questions about your rights as a subject or about injuries caused by this research, contact the Kansas State University Research Compliance Office (URCO) at 532-224 or Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, KSU, Manhattan, KS.

KaCee James

Appendix G - Coding Guide

Theme	Code Name	Definition
Character Development		
Ethical Decision-Making and Responsibility		When teachers provide opportunities for students to evaluate situations and make choices based on ethical and safety considerations, personal and community responsibilities, and short and long-term goals that build resilience and responsible decision making skills. This is supported by consistent modeling of rules, expectations, and accountability.
Core Principles and Classroom Environment		Educators model ethical behavior and foster caring communities by analyzing community needs, promoting responsible action, and providing feedback to students. This includes helping students understand the dynamics of caring and hurtful relationships and providing opportunities for students to recognize, apply and reflect on core ethical principles. Building rapport and positive relationships with students.
Problem Solving		Educators addressing challenges that includes problem definition, creative solution generation, critical thinking, and continuous improvement and involves analyzing problems from multiple perspectives, identifying attainable outcomes, and breaking down complex issues into manageable parts. Educators facilitate this process by emphasizing teamwork, resource utilization, and the importance of both broad and detailed perspectives.
Personal Development		
Self-Awareness and Self-Management		The process of understanding and managing one's own thoughts, mindsets, and emotions. This includes identifying personal qualities, assessing support systems, practicing strategies for thought and behavior management, and developing resilience. Educators foster this by encouraging reflection on perspectives and emotional responses, and by modeling self-care practices like setting boundaries and taking breaks.
Goal Setting and Achievement		Helping students to set, monitor, adapt, and evaluate goals in academic and personal life. This includes creating specific, measurable goals and engaging in reflective practices to assess progress. Educators support this process by guiding students in effective goal writing and facilitating regular review and revision.
Career Planning and Professionalism		Investigating personal interests and exploring potential career paths. This involves utilizing tools like interest surveys and record books to track objectives, and participating in activities like field trips designed to expose students to diverse opportunities and facilitate future planning.
Social Development		
Social Awareness and Empathy		Recognizing and understanding the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others. This includes developing an awareness of cultural issues, respecting human dignity and differences, and cultivating empathy through exposure to diverse situations. Educators foster this by encouraging respectful interactions among students.
Interpersonal Communication and Collaboration		Developing communication and social skills to interact effectively with others. This includes building and maintaining positive relationships, and managing/resolving conflicts through discussion and perspective-taking. Educators facilitate this by creating opportunities for group work, public speaking practice, and team-building activities.
Civic Engagement and Community		Analyzing community needs and designing positive actions to address them. This includes learning about service learning projects and their connection to civic engagement. Educators foster this by encouraging student participation in various community service activities and projects.