

12-2018

# Social-Emotional Skills of Somali Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education

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*Culminating Projects in English*. 146.  
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**Social-Emotional Skills of Somali Students with  
Limited or Interrupted Formal Education**

by

Lauren Thoma Ergen

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts in

English: Teaching English as a Second Language

December, 2018

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## Abstract

This study examines the social-emotional skills of Somali students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). The participant group was Somali students, age eighteen to twenty-one, who self-identified as having limited or interrupted formal education. Participants reported their personal perceptions of their social-emotional skills using a Likert style questionnaire. Some participants were randomly selected to also participate in an interview during which participants provided clarifying examples which supplement the questionnaire data. The questionnaire and interview questions used the five main competencies of social-emotional learning as described by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2017) to measure the Somali SLIFEs' social and emotional skills. The five main competencies used in this study are "self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making" (CASEL, 2017). The data reflects the students' perceptions of their social-emotional skills in each of the five main competencies. This study finds that the Somali SLIFE participants self-report as highly competent in all of the five social-emotional skills. Using the questionnaire, they self-rated Relationship Skills as their most highly competent skill and Social Awareness as the competency in which they are least skilled. The interview data provided many examples which support the questionnaire data. However, the interview also provided examples which did not support the data found using the questionnaire. The interview also produced many other themes related to social emotional skills such as the importance of academic skills, the similarities between friends, and a sense of social separation.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Students with limited or interrupted formal education, sometimes referred to as SLIFE, are a unique sub-set of the English Learner (EL) population within the United States. Though SLIFE and ELs have many similar traits, they have many distinctions, as well. According to Hos (2014), “Refugee SLIFE often have a slightly different background than other immigrant ELLs because of choice of immigration, experiences before immigration that affect their well-being, prior educational experiences, and adjustment to the new culture” (p. 481).

SLIFE represent a relatively small portion of the general EL population in the United States (Francis, Rivera, Lesaux, Kieffer, & Riverea, 2006, p. 4). However, SLIFE are currently enrolling in American schools in growing numbers (Hos, 2014, p. 480). This increase in population calls for additional attention and study of the aspects which make SLIFE different from their EL peers. As Hos (2014) notes, SLIFEs’ emotional state, past educational opportunities, and social transition to an unfamiliar culture set them apart from other students. Due to these trends, it is especially important to attend to SLIFEs’ social and emotional learning needs.

Social-emotional learning encourages social skills and emotional intelligence development within educational realms (Moreira, Pinheiro, Gomes, Cotter, & Ferreira, 2013, p. 68). Teaching social-emotional skills focuses on educating students in ways that encourage them to accomplish common social life tasks with confidence (Elias, 2003, p. 7). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2017), defines five main competencies involved in social-emotional learning: “self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making”. These five main competencies of social-emotional learning are central to this study’s research questions and research tools.

Social and emotional learning can be of special importance to Somali SLIFE. Many Somali SLIFE spend time in refugee camps before entering the United States, fleeing from ongoing war and famine in Somalia. Though different groups of refugees have various experiences, many refugees experience mental and emotional trauma. Refugees may face emotional trauma due to separation from family, friends and their home country (Benseman, 2014). Other experiences that might endanger refugee Somali SLIFEs' mental and emotional health include societal disturbances such as evolving social roles and responsibilities (Hos, 2014, p. 481). Additionally, refugees might experience emotional and mental strain while transitioning to a new location in the United States (Seddon, 2015, p. 51). According to DeCapua, Smathers, and Tang (2009), for SLIFE, "it is often necessary to address emotional needs before the academic ones" (p. 33). All these traits and experiences provide rationale for considering social-emotional learning as an important part of SLIFEs' learning needs.

### **Research Questions and Methodology**

Participants of the study included Somali SLIFE, ages 18 to 21, who attended public high school in central Minnesota. The main research question addressed in this study asks what kinds of social-emotional learning skills (self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, etc.) adolescent SLIFE perceive that they personally employ. In order to answer this, a Likert style questionnaire, as well as interviews, were utilized to allow Somali SLIFE to rate their own abilities relative to the CASEL (2017) five main social-emotional competencies.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Broad Definition of SLIFE

Students with limited or interrupted formal education, sometimes referred to as SLIFE, are a unique subset of the general population of English language learners, or ELLs (Niska, 2016; WIDA Consortium, formally World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment, 2015). According to National Council of Teachers of English (2008), “The terms used to describe ELLs blur, overlap, and change with time, as well as with shifting socio-political dynamics.” Not only are the terms used to define ELLs flexible, so are the identities of ELLs. ELLs are a groups of students who are “highly heterogeneous and complex” (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008, p. 1). ELLs are learners who “represent one of the fastest-growing groups among the school-aged population in this nation” (Francis et al., 2006, p. 3). Adolescent newcomers, generally, are a “relatively small population within the overall ELL population” (Francis et al., 2006, p. 4). However, SLIFE have been enrolling in United States schools in increasing numbers (Hos, 2014, p. 480).

Like various groups of ELLs, students who identify as SLIFE, “share several unifying characteristics”, but are not all the same (WIDA Consortium, 2015, p. 1). Often, SLIFE learn English later in life, which causes them to overlap with some definitions of ELL, but remain distinctly unique (Francis et al., 2006). However, though SLIFE identification may coincide with ELL identification, they are not substitutable terms (Straley, 2016). SLIFE are a specific group because of their exceptional background, and their unique assets as learners. According to Hos (2014), “Refugee SLIFE often have a slightly different background than other immigrant ELLs because of choice of immigration, experiences before immigration that affect their well-being,

prior educational experiences, and adjustment to the new culture” (p. 481). WIDA Consortium (2015) notes that, “English language learners with interrupted educational backgrounds have often experienced more at a young age than their more fortunate peers will experience in a lifetime” (p. 3).

Though SLIFE have many traits and experiences in common, there is not one single, universally accepted definition with which to define the group (Straley, 2016). The numerous ways that SLIFE can be identified make the group difficult to recognize. Niska (2016) defines SLIFE by five possible traits: a) the language most often spoken in the home of the student is not English, or the student does not usually speak in English, b) the student enters American schools after grade 6, c) the student has two or more fewer years of schooling than other ELL peers, d) the student’s reading and math skills are two years below grade standard, and, e) the student is preliterate in his/her first language (Niska, 2016). DeCapua et al. (2009) report some possible characteristics that can help when identifying SLIFE: “inadequate school records, no school records, or school records with gaps; reports by students and/or parents/guardian of not having attended school; poor attendance records from prior schools, frequent absences, and/or tardiness at current school; low literacy level in their native language; weak grasp of grade-level content materials” (p. 6). Some SLIFE come from a country where the educational system does not align with the requirements and standards of the United States’ educational system which creates a disparity in learning opportunities. Other SLIFE come from areas where they never attended a formal school before enrolling in a school in the United States (DeCapua et al., 2009). Still other SLIFE come from an area of the world where few people are literate in their native language (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011).

### **Definition of SLIFE with Regard to Social-Emotional Learning**

The definition of SLIFE includes many traits that have an impact on the social-emotional learning needs of individuals. Social-emotional learning is “the promotion of social and emotional competences in children within scholar contexts” (Moreira et al., 2013, p. 68). Social-emotional skills, sometimes referred to as emotional intelligence, are the learning skills which support students in working together, and holding “essential roles in their families, communities, and places of work” (Elias, 2003, p. 3). Social-emotional teaching encourages students to develop skill they need in order to “manage life tasks successfully” (Elias, 2003, p. 7). Such tasks include, “learning, forming relationships, communicating effectively, being sensitive to others' needs and getting along with others” (Elias, 2003, p. 7). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines five main competencies involved in social-emotional learning: “self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making” (CASEL, 2017). Social emotional learning should be integrated into the teaching of academic learning (Elias, 2003 p. 23).

SLIFE may have backgrounds which affect their needs for social-emotional learning. SLIFE may experience interrupted or limited education because of their migratory nature, and this social movement might require supplementary social learning (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; DeCapua et al.,2009; WIDA Consortium, 2015). SLIFE might also experience war, violence, or civil conflicts in their home country which affect their educational opportunities (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; DeCapua et al., 2009; WIDA Consortium, 2015). Poverty or the financial needs of the students’ families may also affect educational opportunities of SLIFE (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; WIDA Consortium, 2015). SLIFE may also need to commit time and energy to

the care of family members or working in order to support their families, which impedes on their ability to access education (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; WIDA Consortium, 2015). They might have difficulty attending schools because remote locations facilities, lack of sufficient facilities, or inadequate means of transportations (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; WIDA Consortium, 2015). Social constructs and cultural expectations might also influence students' ability to access formal education (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; WIDA Consortium, 2015). Other factors that impact SLIFE's access to formal education include natural disasters (WIDA Consortium, 2015), lack of qualified teachers, or lack of learning resources (DeCapua et al., 2009). Each of these experiences may affect SLIFE's interaction with formal schooling, and social-emotional learning. They might also cause a disconnect between SLIFE and social competencies, or between SLIFE and their own personal recognition.

### **Diversity within SLIFE**

Though general descriptions of SLIFE and their experiences are available, they are not an easily defined group. Several different labels and acronyms, such as LLRB (low-literacy refugee background) (Windle & Miller, 2012), SIFE (students with interrupted formal education), or explicit descriptions of students' status such as newcomer (Straley, 2016; National Council of Teachers of English, 2008, p. 2) are used to describe students who have gaps or disruptions in their education (DeCapua et al., 2009; Straley, 2016). Because this group is so diverse (DeCapua et al., 2009), different terms can describe individuals and groups more accurately. DeCapua and Marshall (2011) note that, "SLIFE are by no means a homogeneous group; they come from all over the world, from diverse languages, backgrounds, and life experiences, and we must be careful not to overgeneralize or stereotype these students when they enter our

classrooms” (p. 5). It is important to remember that a student, even if they match SLIFE descriptions, is still unique.

### **SLIFE as Learners**

A key part of defining and describing SLIFE involves their role as learners. By definition, SLIFE are new to the United States school system (WIDA Consortium, 2015) so examining them as learners is uniquely pertinent. WIDA Consortium notes that “the vast majority” of SLIFE are registered between grade six and grade 12 (WIDA Consortium, 2015). Minnesota Department of Education aligns with that evaluation, and in fact defines SLIFE as enrolling in American schools after grade six (Niska, 2016). Recognizing that SLIFE are adolescent learners, and that they are gaining exposure to a new, complex educational system later in life is important when considering what makes SLIFE unique.

SLIFE’s academic needs can be grouped into two categories: language and content. According to DeCapua and Marshall (2011), “Because formal education is so closely tied to literacy, ELLs who comprise this subpopulation of high school students commonly have literacy skills far below grade level, and may even be completely new to literacy” (p. 2). Lack of literacy creates a great divide between SLIFE’s academic needs, and the needs of their non-SLIFE English learning peers. Because of varying access and experiences with schooling before entering United States schools, SLIFE also often don’t have knowledge of grade-level content comparable to their peers (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). WIDA suggests that gaining a complete knowledge of students’ history, including their social, emotional, and academic experiences, can help guide schools’ in making decisions to best serve SLIFE’s learning needs (WIDA Consortium, 2015).

As an example of how SLIFE's academic content needs differ from their ELL peers' needs, I refer to the content standards for ELL students which WIDA Consortium (2014) describes. These standards are not specifically designed for SLIFE. Of the many different standards WIDA details, I looked at a science content standard for an example. The standard is for grades 9-12, and focuses on the listening domain involved in the language of science. Because SLIFE typically have minimal English skills and little experience with U.S. schools (WIDA Consortium, 2015), I chose the level one "entering" standard in an effort to best fit SLIFE's academic language needs. However, the standard suggests students should be able to "collect and share real-life materials needed for scientific investigation based on oral directions with a partner" (WIDA Consortium, 2014). This standard might be particularly difficult for a SLIFE student to successfully complete if the student had limited or no experience with using tools associated with scientific tasks. Their lack of experience might create a gap in the background knowledge of the associated content necessary to complete this language task.

Another unique learning need of SLIFE is that they are new to the underlying design and "system" of United States schools (WIDA Consortium, 2015). Formal education has a specific shape and pattern of function (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011). SLIFE, who have limited experience with the structure of formal education may find it difficult to navigate. According to DeCapua and Marshall (2011) "SLIFE face cultural dissonance every day in the classroom, the hallways, the school grounds, and in all aspects of their school experience." (p. 3). Supporting SLIFE's developing understanding of United States school structure is important to supporting SLIFE's academic development.



## **Somali Learners**

Culture is an important part of any learner. Somali culture is a mix of customs stemming from roots in Islam, nomadic and urban lifestyles, and influence from Western societies (Farid & McMahan, 2004, p. 1). One major facet of Somali culture is collectivist identity. According to Farid and McMahan (2014), “Somalis believe that a person who behaves properly and accomplishes many good things in his life is seen not only as a credit to himself and his immediate family, but also as a credit to his father and his forefathers” (p. 2). Other key concepts that are held in high esteem in Somali culture are respect, especially to adults, and education (Farid & McMahan, 2004, p. 2).

Many Somali SLIFE spend time in refugee camps before entering the United States, fleeing from ongoing war and famine in Somalia. Due to the strife in Somalia, “ramshackle refugee camps were quickly set up, and chain-link fences were built around them” (Farid & McMahan, 2004, p. 17). The camps were run poorly and with little integrity, according to Farid and McMahan (2004), which led to “malnutrition, starvation, and diseases” (p. 17). “Many thousands” of people were killed publicly; the killings occurred in the presence of adults and children alike (Farid & McMahan, 2004, p. 48). In this climate, “starvation and day-to-day survival set the rules of behavior” (Farid & McMahan, 2004, p. 48). Many Somalis in America today grew up in such camps (Farid & McMahan, 2004).

Somali students in American schools may also lack family supports due to their circumstances. Adults faced many of the same survival and social challenges as children (Farid & McMahan, 2004, p. 48). According to Farid and McMahan (2004), “most of the Somali children who come to Minnesota have not had the benefit of a stable family life by any

description” (p. 48). The diaspora of Somalis separated many families; some families eventually reunite, and others do not (Farid & McMahan, 2004, p. 49).

Even after leaving Somalia, many Somali students still experience obstacles. Leaving home indefinitely presents its own challenges to Somalis. Omar (2006) notes that “the phenomenon of visiting the homeland and returning to one’s roots is common across many immigrant communities, but it is a special concern for the Somalis, who have suffered many years of war, emotional memories, and physical trauma” (p. 12). Even Somalis who only briefly or never lived in Somalia might experience trauma due to the distress their community experienced. Farid and McMahan (2004) observe that “the fear and distrust, infused by more than a decade of torture and instability, has become a mode of existence for many, and is passed on to the next generation” ( p. 18).

### **Refugee Learners**

Though Somali refugees are certainly a unique group of people, their experience as refugees is shared by many around the world. Benseman (2014) conducted interviews with 36 diverse refugees. Some had traveled directly to their country of relocation, New Zealand, and others had spent years in refugee camps (Benseman, 2014). Hos (2014) completed an ethnographic study of 19 newcomer immigrants from Yemen, and newcomer refugees from Thailand, and Nepal (p. 487). Some of the participants in Hos’ (2014) study had never been to their countries of origin; they were born in refugee camps (p. 481). Both Benseman (2014) and Hos (2014) studies report trauma as an important trait of refugee learners’ experience. Likewise, Seddon (2015) studied two Minnesota high schools with high ELL populations with regards to the function of counseling within the schools’ ELL population. Seddon (2015) reports that the

trauma that many refugee students have experienced “has resulted in physical and emotional stress damage” (p. 68).

Many refugees experience mental and emotional trauma. Refugees may be emotionally troubled by separation from family, friends and their home country (Benseman, 2014). They may feel mental repercussions caused by prolonged waiting in camps, difficulty making progress towards relocation, and with ambiguity about future options and lack of autonomy (Benseman, 2014). Refugees might also be challenged by adapting to frequently changing locations (Benseman, 2014, p. 26). Other experiences that might put risk on refugee’s mental and emotional health include societal disturbances such as evolving social roles and responsibilities (Hos, 2014, p. 481). Additionally, refugees might experience emotional and mental trauma while transitioning to a new location in the United States (Seddon, 2015, p. 51). Such problems with relocation may include poverty and financial confusion, housing disturbances, shifting familial roles, unfamiliar government and legal ongoing, and lack of employment (Windle & Miller, 2012).

In addition to mental and emotional trauma, many refugees experience physical trauma. Some refugees experience incarceration, torture, and sexual assault (Benseman, 2014, p. 16). According to Farid and McMahan (2004), an estimated 35% of Somali refugees have been tortured (Farid & McMahan, 2004, p. 18). Others endure health problems that go untreated, which may eventually become chronic conditions, physical disabilities, or enduring mental health concerns such as anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder (Benseman, 2014, p. 16; Windle & Miller, 2012, p. 319). Seddon (2015) notes that the overpopulation of refugee camps can lead to physical trauma: “surviving with a lack of resources is difficult for ELL students to process

and overcome.” (p. 51). Other refugees witness or personally experience violence (Windle & Miller, 2012, p. 319).

Emotional, mental, and physical trauma has a significant effect on refugee students. Benseman (2014) interviewed tutors who work with refugee and non-refugee students. The tutors noted “the effects of psychological trauma on the ability to learn” in the refugee students particularly (Benseman, 2014, p. 19). Benseman (2014) states that, while it is difficult to measure the degree and style of effect refugees’ experiences have on learning “it is clear that these learners bring much to the classroom that is not always immediately discernible that can impede and delay their rate of progress compared with other learners” (p. 26). Other effects on education that may be associated with refugee students are low attendance rates, course failures, and difficulty acclimating to high school culture (Windle & Miller, 2012, p. 319).

### **Somali SLIFE**

Many of the experiences that Somali students have in refugee camps and in the process of relocating to a new home result in them identifying as SLIFE. Many Somali students who live in the United States now spent much of their childhood in refugee camps (Farid & McMahan, 2004, p. 18). Many of these Somali SLIFE are not emotionally or socially prepared for the integration process that their transition from refugee camps to the United States requires. This can result in them being emotionally unstable (Baker & Sienkewicz, 2005, p. 56). Clearly, newcomers have little or no knowledge and experience with the United States school systems when they arrive, but most Somali students who arrive in Minnesota also do not have experience with the Somali school system (Farid & McMahan, 2004, p. 9). Somali students have been “deeply affected by

the civil war” and consequent strife in Somalia (Farid & McMahan, 2004, p. 18), which in many ways impacts their status as SLIFE.

### **Culture, Identity and Learning**

When considering the social and emotional learning needs of students, it is important to take into account the impact that their cultures and identities have on their learning. In order to effectively teach, it is crucial for educators to know about their students, and have tools to continue to learn about them (Mahalingappa, Rodriguez, & Polat, 2017, p. 3). Culture and identity are important factors in supporting the five core competencies involved in social-emotional learning. The competencies “self-awareness”, “self-management”, and “responsible decision-making” involve information about the students’ identities. The competencies “social awareness” and “relationship skills” involve information about students’ culture (CASEL, 2017). Clearly, understanding students’ identities and cultures will help in understanding students’ social-emotional learning needs.

### **Culture and Learning**

DeCapua and Marshall simply and directly state that “culture matters” (2011, p. 11). Culture dictates and describes a lot of traits about a person, and even includes unintentional traits such as “values, beliefs, norms, and ways of both interpreting and understanding the world around us” (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011, p. 11). The lens that culture provides students certainly effects their learning. Benseman interviewed several tutors of SLIFE refugees who noted that their work with such students provided them with a “greater understanding of cultural barriers both inside and outside the classroom (especially the discrimination refugees face)” (Benseman, 2014, p. 22).

One kind of cultural barrier is the cultural dissonance that Somali SLIFE might experience. Cultural dissonance is “the mismatch between home and school when SLIFE, who come from different cultural values and different learning paradigms, encounter the mainstream cultural values and learning paradigm of U.S. school” (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011, p. 25). Cultural dissonance can lead to poor academic performance of students, which potentially leads to lack of achievement (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011, p. 25). To combat such obstacles, teachers should create a classroom which promotes skills for cultural learning, rather than “set culture learning outcomes” (Damen, 2003, p. 84).

### **Identity and Learning**

Students’ identity is another important factor in understanding their social and emotional learning needs. Students’ identities are not “blank slates waiting to be constructed by others”; their backgrounds and personal experiences play a factor in constructing their own identity (Kubota & Lin, 2009, p. 110). According to Hall (2013), “identity is multiple and varied” (p. 99). Identity includes “social histories”, and continues to evolve daily through ongoing experiences (Hall, 2013, p. 41).

Identity of SLIFE is especially important because of their ongoing language learning while also learning social and emotional skills. Second language learners typically create a revised identity, or “language ego”, as they learn the new language (DeCapua et al., 2009, p. 32). However, SLIFE are second language learners who take on a new language later in life. Because SLIFE are learning as adolescents or adults, they are unlikely to “become full-fledged members of the second language speech community” (Saville-Troike, 2003, p. 6). This identity conundrum

of creating a new identity, but never fully joining the new language community, is an important part of understanding the social and emotional needs of SLIFE.

Language can also be used as a tool to renovate identity. Hall (2013) notes that “at any communicative moment there exists the possibility of taking up a unique stance towards our own identity and those of others” ( p. 35). Additionally, language used in social or cultural situations can affect the construct of social roles amongst those included in the interaction (Hall, 2013, p. 44). The flexibility of identity is affected by “the historical and sociopolitical forces embodied in them” (Hall, 2013, p. 35). In this way, SLIFE can use language as a tool to affect their own identities, and the social role of their identity in relation to others. When considering social and emotional learning, it is clear that language can be a tool of learning.

Identity is especially important to Somali SLIFE. Somali community leaders identify that their greatest concerns for Somali adolescences pertain to identity (Bigelow, 2010, p. 94). When individuals are members of various groups, they create different identities which tie them to the different groups (Hall, 2013, p. 41). For many Somali SLIFE in the United States, there is significant disconnect between a Somali identity and an American identity. Bigelow (2010) notes that “being in the middle is like being nowhere because the middle is neither Somali nor American” (p. 94). Likewise, Omar (2016) reports that a Somali refugee described “not being Somali enough or American enough” as eliciting a feeling of being “trapped” between the two separate identities (p. 39). However, Omar (2016) also describes a different Somali refugee who perceives his identity to be dependent on social context, and feels that he represents an identity which integrates being Somali and American (p. 40).

Racialization is another factor that affects how Somali SLIFE perceive and construct identity. Race impacts the social, cultural, and political aspects of teaching and learning language (Kubota & Lin, 2009, p. 16). Moreover, adolescent Somalis who enter the United States “almost invariably” undergo effects of racialization as they adjust to a new, minority social status (Bigelow, 2010). Bigelow (2010) notes that “Because Somali youth experience racism and Islamophobia in a number of settings, it is important to consider what could be done at school to support youth as they make sense of their experiences and find ways to respond to discrimination, bias, and ignorance” (p. 116). Similarly, Kubota and Lin (2009) affirm that second language teachers’ awareness of their own perceptions of racial identity can be influential to how educators understand students’ needs (p. 17). Teachers’ awareness of race in their classroom can help to create a more informed understanding of students’ social and emotional learning needs.

### **Social-Emotional Learning Needs**

Understanding the experiences of SLIFE refugees helps explain the social and emotional learning needs of such students. DeCapua et al. (2009) note that simply the experience of leaving familiar cultures and languages of home can cause ELLs to “have social and affective needs related to language learning and cultural adjustment (p. 32). SLIFE might experience additional mental and emotional obstacles in their resettlement (DeCapua et al., p. 33). According to DeCapua et al. (2009), for SLIFE, “it is often necessary to address emotional needs before the academic ones” (p. 33).



## **Personal Emotional Learning Needs**

SLIFE individuals might have emotional needs within themselves. SLIFE entering United States schools might find that exhaustion, homesickness, and mental illnesses like depression pose problems to learning (Benseman, 2014, p. 18). Other internal obstacles to learning that Somali SLIFE might experience are the emotional repercussions of familial death or illness, and other traumatic experiences in refugee camps (Seddon, 2015, p. 52). These emotional repercussions may manifest as distrustful or violent behavior (Seddon, 2015, p. 52). Other personal traits such as “resilience, struggles over identity, and structural and individual discrimination” play a role in the personal emotional needs an individual might possess (Hos, 2014, p. 482).

Integration into new homes can be another personal experience that affects SLIFE’s emotional learning needs. DeCapua et al. (2009) describe the feelings involved in relocating to a different culture as “culture shock” (p. 34) and the feelings involved in enrolling in a new, unfamiliar United States school and educational system as “school shock” (p. 36). Both of these experiences can create emotional needs in SLIFE. According to Hos (2014), “Adolescent refugees may be vulnerable to mental health problems resulting from stressors such as migration, acculturative stress, and the stress of learning a new language” (p. 482). In order to manage the stress of changing living climates, SLIFE may require additional support through the transition, especially in terms of learning and practicing coping strategies and processing painful experiences (Seddon, 2015, p. 51).

Uniquely difficult to Somali SLIFE dealing with personal emotional needs is the cultural stigma that surrounds mental health within their own culture. There is no Somali word for the

concept of depression (Farid & McMahan, 2004, p. 25), despite evidence that many Somali refugees might experience it. Seddon (2015) reports that among ELL students, Somali students especially “may have a negative perception of mental health or special services” (p. 52). This negative perception causes Somali students to feel reluctant to talk through personal experiences and emotional needs (Seddon, 2015, p. 52). Social-emotional education can promote their comfort and skill set to take on these intimidating tasks.

Another important aspect of an individual SLIFE’s emotional needs may be post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. SLIFE who have spent time in areas where war, violence, or natural disasters may have PTSD (DeCapua et al., 2009, p. 33; Seddon, 2015, p. 51). Effects of PTSD vary widely. The effects may cause SLIFE to be extra sensitive to perceived threat and unlikely to self-soothe under the pressure of stress (Farid & McMahan, 2004, p. 54). Other common symptoms include “withdrawal from group activities; agitation; sleep disturbances; physical symptoms such as headaches or stomach problems; depression and self-destructive behaviors and/or unexplained outbursts of anger, among others” (DeCapua et al., 2009, pp. 33-24). It is clear how these reactions due to PTSD could negatively affect students’ learning (DeCapua et al., 2009, p. 34). Moreover, social-emotional learning can help SLIFE directly respond to these challenges.

### **Social Learning Needs**

Not only is it possible that SLIFE have personal emotional needs due to individual experiences, but they may also need support for developing social roles and relationships. Because SLIFE learn a second language later in life, and are likely unable to entirely gain access to the second language speech community, they may be discriminated against in a number of

ways (Saville-Troike, 2003, p. 6). Miller, Mitchell, and Brown (2005), show data reflecting SLIFE's difficulty managing aggression, emotional fluctuation, and frustration with racism (p. 25). Moreover, social identifiers, like religious identification, can present social challenges to SLIFE "that can lead to negative socioemotional and academic outcomes" (Mahalingappa et al., 2017, p. 91).

The perceptions of SLIFE within a new society may affect how they fill social roles. SLIFE may be minorities, which can cause them to not trust existing social structures. This distrust can lead them to disengage with social roles (Bigelow, 2010, p. 148). Other traits that may cause SLIFE to disengage from social relationships are lack of confidence communicating in their second language, and embarrassment (Windle & Miller, 2012, p. 319). As SLIFE spend more time in their new location, feelings of distrust increase. Consequently, disengagement from social roles within United States institutions, such as schools and government, also increase (Bigelow, 2010, p. 148).

Dodds, Karantzas, Lin, Brooker, Alber, and Lawrence (2010) conducted a study comparing three groups of elementary students' self-perceptions. The three groups involved in the study were the Somali Group, consisting of children of Somali refugee families; the Disadvantaged Group, consisting of students who live in state housing; and the Advantaged Group, consisting of students whose families are lower middle class and live in privately owned or rented homes. Students selected phrases to describe themselves.

Some self-perceptions were consistent across the Somali, Disadvantaged, and Advantaged groups. The three groups all chose "I am a good friend" most frequently among the self-related skills (Dodds et al., 2010, p. 16). Similarly, all three groups selected "I am loving"

least frequently among the self-related skills (Dodds et al., 2010, p. 16). This demonstrates a lack of social differences between the three groups.

The children among the Somali group indicated a wide variety of self-perceptions (Dodds et al., 2010, p. 19), but the group still produced some outstanding trends. The Somali group, like the other groups, indicated “I am loving” as their least strong self-related skill. However, “the Somali Group had a relatively lower mean than Disadvantaged and Advantaged Groups, in comparison with their overall group mean” (Dodds et al., 2010, p. 17). Additionally, the Somali group indicated “I am brave” more than the other groups (Dodds et al., 2010, p. 17). The indication “I am loving” is defined among the “social attributes”, unlike “I am brave”, which is defined as a “personal attribute” (Dodds et al., 2010, p. 12). These indications can show how the Somali group perceives themselves as less loving, and thus weaker in social attributes, and braver, and thus stronger in personal attributes, as compared to the Disadvantaged and Advantaged peer groups.

Dodds et al. (2010) observed that the Somali group indicated many of the same self-perceptions of their intelligences as their peers. When the Somali group differed in their selections from the other groups, the distinctions seem to be based in cultural norms and values (Dodds et al., 2010). However, the Somali group indicated their rejection of being loving more than the other groups. Dodds et al. (2010) notes that “This cross-group agreement in the relative rejection of loving and caring social skills seems to be contrary to the responsibilities for younger siblings often found in large ethnic families” (p. 21). This, like the Somali groups indication of bravery skills over happiness, disrupt the generalization that the Somali group’s trends which diverge from the other groups are based in culture. Dodds et al. (2010) state that “It

is possible that displacement and hardship have led refugee parents to foster in their children resilience in the face of adversity” (p. 21). This could be a possible explanation for the indication of self-perception provided by the Somali group.

### **Roles of Schools in Social-Emotional Learning**

According to Bigelow (2010) “the high school experience of Somali, refugee, Muslim youth with limited formal schooling and low levels of print literacy offers and intense intersection of social, cultural, and educational issues” (p. 149). It is of extra importance to understand the role schools fill in the process of learning social and emotional skills. A lot of social learning happens in schools’ many different settings such as classrooms, playgrounds, lunch rooms, and extracurricular groups (Mahalingappa et al., 2017, p. 57). In these scenarios, “youth build friendships, learn how to negotiate disagreements, and develop the social skills that will support them as members of a diverse society” (Mahalingappa et al., 2017, p. 57). Hos (2014) emphasizes the importance of the role of schools in social-emotional learning: “Schools, in most cases, are the primary contexts through which refugee children learn about and are socialized to their relocation community” (p. 480).

Another important aspect of schools’ roles in social-emotional learning is their ability to educate SLIFE about the social behaviors expected for learning in United States schools. Behavior expected of students in American schools include a variety of social skills, and social conducts which, according to Miller et al. (2005), “are huge challenges for students arriving aged 15, with minimal or no schooling” (p. 23). Miller et al. (2005) note that some of the main issues which distinguish SLIFE from their peers in school settings are gaps in coping with trauma and navigating the details of social expectations in learning situations (p. 31). Likewise, Windle and

Miller (2012) identify SLIFE's lack of experience with schools' routines, and social and cultural standards of education in America as problematic to their overall learning (p. 319). These gaps demonstrate why schools' ability to explicitly teach social expectations are important to SLIFE's overall learning experience.

Part of schools' role in supporting social-emotional learning is keeping the students' needs central in decision making. Because SLIFE are unique members of the learning community, their goals and needs should be considered exceptionally. DeCapua et al. (2009) state that schools should ask this question when considering SLIFE in school settings: "What can we, as educators, do to help SLIFE find jobs and take their places in society?" (p. 40). SLIFE have unique traits that they bring to their learning communities, such as "having goals, resourcefulness, curiosity, and a vision for better life" (Hos, 2014, p. 482). When SLIFE have a recognized role in the educational choices made for themselves, it can help ensure that SLIFE have "positive school experiences" which Hos (2014) claim are "crucial to reestablish order in the lives of the refugee children traumatized by violence" (p. 482). Having a quality and welcoming experience in schools can help build self-confidence in SLIFE, which may support social-emotional learning (Hos, 2014, p. 482).

### **Social-Emotional Learning Goals**

Social-emotional learning is central to many SLIFE's educational goals. Benseman (2014) notes that refugees reported that their goals for attending classes include learning enough English for daily social tasks such as navigating stores or building relationships with neighbors (p. 17). Indeed, it makes sense that Somali SLIFE might first prioritize social and emotional learning

goals over academic goals, because social and emotional learning connects directly to their personal, daily life.

SLIFE also have social relationship goals which connect to social-emotional learning. Benseman (2014) observed of refugee students that central to their own personal reasons for pursuing education was “a strong desire to achieve personal independence so that they do not have to rely on their children, spouse or a third party in order to do things such as talk to their doctor or their children’s teachers” (p. 17). This observation demonstrates two ways social learning impacts SLIFE’s relationships. First, it can allow them to feel independent and preserve existing social relationship roles. Second, it can allow them to build new relationships with others in order to connect in a variety of social realms. Moreover, because social and emotional skills have a substantial influence on participation in appropriate relationships, it is important to consider the numerous other ways that social and emotional learning can affect the social relationship roles filled by SLIFE (Moreira et al., 2013).

Social and emotional learning goals can also affect SLIFEs’ academic goals. DeCapua et al. (2009) state, “For SLIFE, a supportive learning environment is particularly important and conducive to successful learning outcomes” (p. 39). Many social-emotional skills like personal control, emotional regulation, and self-discipline, are connected to academic performance (Moreira et al., 2013). The effect of social-emotional learning goals and academic goals can go both ways. Completion of academic goals can build confidence, which can support the same social-emotional learning goals and conducive learning environment that originally helped complete the academic goal (Benseman, 2014, p. 26).

## **Social and Emotional Skills in Other Student Groups**

The Partner for Student Success Goal 2 project focused on the academic success of kindergarten through grade 8 students in central Minnesota, including the St. Cloud, Sauk Rapids-Rice, and Sartell-St. Stephen communities. The group defined success as possessing these skills before entering high school: “be academically prepared, possess strong social and emotional skills, have a sense of belonging, view education/learning as important” (Mayberry & Kalenze, 2017).

In St. Cloud school district, three student groups were identified as the highest priority groups based on “the level of performance of academic and nonacademic measures of success as well as the number of students within a group”. One group was Free and Reduced Eligible Students, which represented 59% of the student population. The second group was African American students, which represented 18% of the student population. The third group was Somali American students, which represented 14% of the student population (Mayberry & Kalenze, 2017).

The team identified four main root causes for Somali American students’ lack of preparedness: “pace of English language skill acquisition, lack of after school academic supports, lack of access to existing programming, distractions from social factors”. Similarly, the team identified three root causes for African American students’ lack of preparedness: “inadequate approaches for engagement of families, dualistic academic and social & emotional learning systems, low expectations of students” (Mayberry & Kalenze, 2017). For both student groups, some of the factors are related to social and emotional needs.



The team also used social and emotional data from the MN Student Survey administered in 2016. The data showed a stark comparison between African American and Somali American students self-reported social and emotional competencies. In the category about social competence, African American students scored 0.54 while Somali American students scored 0.73. The category about the students' commitment to learning and their perception of the importance of education showed that the African American students reported 0.73 and the Somali American students reported 0.89. When asked about their sense of belonging and perception of teacher and school support, African American students scored 0.48 and the Somali American students scored 0.71. Similarly, when asked about their sense of belonging pertaining to their families and communities support of them, African American students reported 0.64 and Somali American students reported 0.84. For the category about positive identity, African American students scored 0.53 and the Somali American students scored 0.74. In all these categories, the students in the free or reduced lunch eligible group scored higher than the African American students, but below the Somali American students (Mayberry & Kalenze, 2017). According to Mayberry and Kalenze, "Somali American Students are the highest performing group in the district on the non-academic measures of success". It is clear that across these categories of social emotional competencies, the Somali American students surveyed perceive their skills to be stronger than the African American group as well as the free or reduced lunch eligible group.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Research Question

1. What social-emotional skills (self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, etc.) do adolescent Somali SLIFE perceive that they possess?

### Participants

This study focuses on Somali Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE) who, at the time of data collection, attended and urban, public high school in central Minnesota. The members of this group all consider Somali their first language. They also identify their ethnicity as Somali. They exhibit various levels of English proficiency, but all are English Learners (ELs). Importantly, all the participants were identified as SLIFE, distinctly from their identification as EL. Most of these students have lived in Somalia, or a refugee camp with other Somalis, but physically residing in Somalia is not a requirement for participation. Identification of Somali participants was determined by a question about self-reported ethnicity included in the Student Personal Identifiers Survey.

English learner students who attended the high school included in this study were invited to complete the Student Personal Identifiers Survey in order to identify if they were eligible to participate. Those who completed the survey and did not self-report as ethnically Somali, did not self-report as speaking Somali as their first language, did not self-report an age eighteen and twenty-one, or indicated “yes” to the five traits included on the Student Personal Identifiers Survey to identify SLIFE status were not invited to participate in the study.

In total, 40 students participated in this study. Of those 40 participants who completed the questionnaire, twelve also participated in interviews. The students represent a mix of gender.

Twelve male and 28 female students participated. The students were between 18 and 21 years of age. Sixteen participants were 18 years old. Fourteen participants were 19 years old. Four participants were 20 years old. Six participants were 21 years old. The participants have resided in the United States between 0 and 7 years. The number of years the participants have lived in the United States is below:

Table 1

*Number of Years Participants have Lived in the United States*

<b>Years <math>\leq 1</math></b>	<b><math>1 &lt; Y \leq 2</math></b>	<b><math>2 &lt; Y \leq 3</math></b>	<b><math>3 &lt; Y \leq 4</math></b>	<b><math>4 &lt; Y \leq 5</math></b>	<b><math>5 &lt; Y \leq 6</math></b>	<b><math>6 &lt; Y \leq 7</math></b>
6	8	5	13	6	1	1

Another important trait of the participants is their pre-existing relationship to the researcher. The participants, at the time of the study, all attended the school where the researcher is a teacher. Many of the participants were students in the researchers' class in previous years. Some participants were currently attending the researchers' class at the time of data collection. Additionally, some participants had never been a student of the researcher, but possibly recognized the researcher as a teacher from their time in the school building together. Since the participants had a relationship with the researcher prior to this study, it is important to identify the relationship as it is a unique aspect of the participants.

### **Materials**

The primary varieties of data elicitation for this study were surveys and questionnaires. As a supplement, some participants also engaged in an interview. The first data collection tool was the Student Personal Identifiers Survey. This gathered pertinent personal information about the participants. It also verified that the individuals met the requirements to participate in the

study; for example, it identified that the potential participants considered themselves ethnically Somali.

Once relevant, personal information about the participants was gathered and identified them as candidates for the study, then the participants received a Social Emotional Questionnaire. The questionnaire included questions pertaining to the five main competencies involved in social-emotional learning as described by CASEL (2017). The questionnaire utilized Likert style scales in order to maintain accurately descriptive reporting while utilizing linguistically appropriate directions and questions (Mackey & Gass, 2016, p. 63; Gass & Mackey, 2007, p. 148). Some participants were selected to participate in the interview portion. The interview was brief, and asked participants to provide specific examples which support their claims about social emotional competencies reported in the questionnaire.

The survey, the questionnaire, and the interview were linguistically appropriate and short so that the ELs completing them were comfortable and so that the tools were respectful of the participants' time. Both the survey and questionnaire were written documents and administered in a quiet setting when ample time is provided. If necessary, an interpreter was available to help clarify the questions in the survey and questionnaire. The interview was an oral interview. Participants answered verbally but were provided visuals of the questions so they could hear, read, and review the questions.

**Student Personal Identifiers Survey.** The Student Personal Identifiers Survey was the first survey provided to the student participants. It was designed to inquire personal information about each student. Important information that the survey asked include age, ethnicity, first language, number of years living in the United States. The survey was also used to identify

SLIFE, in order to ensure that the participants were appropriate for the study. In order to identify SLIFE, the survey asked if the student identifies with scenarios that describe SLIFE. For example, one question is, “Did you start school in the United States after grade 6?” The survey includes four questions about the students’ personal information, as well as five yes/no questions to determine if they are SLIFE.

**Student social emotional questionnaire.** This questionnaire was administered after the Student Personal Identifiers Survey. The purpose of this questionnaire was to reflect students’ self-perceptions about the competencies CASEL (2017) describes as being the core to social-emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Participants reported their self-perceptions using a Likert Scale response style. The scale offered 4 choices so that students must choose on one side of the spectrum or the other, not exactly in the middle. An example question is this:

I think I have a lot of good friends.  
*Yes ----- yes a little -----no a little -----no*

The questionnaire included 10 statements with possible responses on a Likert Scale. Each of the five main competencies of social-emotional learning, as described by CASEL (2017), was represented by two statements.

**Student interview.** Some students were selected to participate in an interview. Interview participants were selected randomly from the larger pool of participants who completed the Student Social Emotional Questionnaire. Interviews were conducted individually in a quiet and private place. Participants were asked the questions orally, as well as provided with a visual of the questions. Students answered each question verbally, and the researcher recorded their answers. These answers helped to elaborate on the data provided in the questionnaire. The

interview had five questions. Each of the five main competencies (CASEL, 2017) of social-emotional skills were represented in one question. The questions asked participants to elaborate on one of the questionnaire questions. An example question is this: Tell me about an important decision you made. What helped you decide?

### **Procedure**

**Data collection.** Student participants were voluntary. I met with participants individually. I explained that their reports would in no way effect my relationship with them, especially because the Student Personal Identifiers Survey and the Student Social Emotional Questionnaire are anonymous.

Students who wished to participate first completed the Student Personal Identifiers Survey. This survey helped gather background information as well as verify that the individual was an appropriate candidate for this study. This survey was completed with paper and pencil, because students are likely to have experience using these tools and feel comfortable using them. Students had as much time as they needed to answer these questions. The survey took approximately 5 minutes to complete. If students wanted an interpreter to clarify the questions, that was arranged.

Next, participants completed the Student Social Emotional Questionnaire. This questionnaire utilized pencil and paper to record their responses. Participants had as much time as they needed to complete the questionnaire, and access to an interpreter. The directions clearly explained how to report their response using the Likert scale, as well as provide an example.

When students finished the Student Personal Identifiers Survey and the Student Social Emotional Questionnaire, they submitted both forms together. The forms were submitted to a

box located away from the researcher to maintain anonymousness. Some students were invited to participate in the interview. Students who participate in the interview answered five questions orally.

### **Analysis**

Data from each of the research tools was analyzed with relation to the following research question:

1. What social-emotional skills (self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, etc.) do adolescent Somali SLIFE perceive that they possess?

The Student Personal Identifiers Surveys were used to identify individuals who were appropriate participants for the study. The Student Social Emotional Questionnaire directly asked questions about the students' self-perceptions of various social-emotional learning needs. It focused closely on the research question, and explicitly answered it. The students' data was reported on a Likert Scale, so the degree of their answers can be associated to corresponding numbers to derive statistical data trends. For example, an answer of "yes" may correlate to "4" while an answer of "a little yes" correlates to "3". Likewise, the answer "a little no" correlates to a "2" and "no" correlates to "1". By using numbers, I could accurately find averages, modes, and other statistical answers to research questions.

## Chapter 4: Results

The results of this study were gathered from a questionnaire and individual interviews. These two sources of data are utilized in order better measure participants' social-emotional competencies. Participants were asked to provide examples in the interview of the skills they self-reported in the questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire are presented here, organized by each of the five main social-emotional skills. The results of the interviews are organized by the themes which emerged from the interview conversations.

Below is a table which shows the questionnaire data, organized by each of the five main social-emotional competencies included in this study. The table includes the average score of each competency, the standard deviation of the participants' scores, the mode and the range of the scores. The table also includes the average, standard deviation, mode and range of all five main competencies combined. This table shows that the questionnaire data is consistently high across all five competencies. However, the range shows that there are low outliers in the competencies of Self-Awareness, and Social-Awareness. In each of these competencies, one participant self-reported an average of one which indicates they do not perceive themselves as competent at all in that social-emotional skill. This table shows that, generally, participants believe they are highly competent in social-emotional skills, across each of the five different skills.



Table 2

*Questionnaire Data*

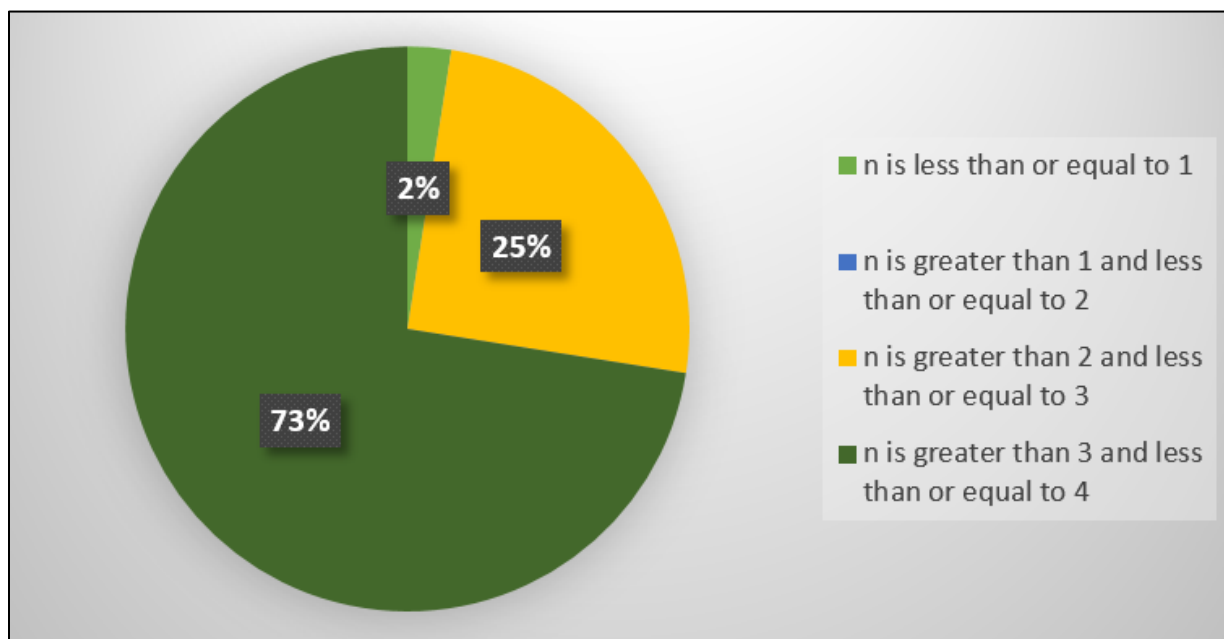
<b>Social-Emotional Competency</b>	<b>Average (1-4)</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Median</b>
<i>Self-Awareness</i>	3.425	0.703	4	3	3.5
<i>Self-Management</i>	3.763	0.447	4	2	4
<i>Social Awareness</i>	3.413	0.757	4	3	3.75
<i>Relationship Skills</i>	3.838	0.324	4	1	4
<i>Responsible Decision making</i>	3.463	0.616	4	2	3.5
<i>Overall Average</i>	3.580	0.5694	4	3	N/A

**Self-Awareness Results**

Self-awareness was the first main social-emotional competency addressed in the questionnaire. Questions 1 and 2 of the Student Social Emotional Questionnaire ask participants to self-rate their self-awareness skills. Question one posed the statement, “I can easily describe my personality”, and question two “I know what activities I am good at doing”. The average of the participants’ responses to these two questions is 3.425, which is between “yes” and “yes a little”. The standard deviation of the self-awareness questions is 0.703. The range of this competency was 3, but there was only one participant who identified as scoring 1 and no participants who identified between 1 and 2. The mode was 4, and the median was 3.5. Participants self-reported their Self-awareness skills as highly competent consistently.

Participants represented their proficiency for each of the social-emotional skill related questions using a scale ranging from one to four. As you can see in the chart below, 73% of participants scored their proficiency in self-awareness tasks between three and four, indicating a

high proficiency. Twenty-five percent of participants scored between two and three. Only 2% of participants scored less than or equal to one. No participants reported scores between 1 and 2. The range of this competency is three because of the one participant who scored less than one. Otherwise, the participants identified with scores above two. The participants who self-scored between 3 and 4 are in the majority.



*Figure 1.* Self-awareness average.

### **Self-Management Results**

Questions 3 and 4 of the Student Social Emotional Questionnaire address participants' self-management. The self-management statements which students responded to was "I know how to make myself happy" and "I have goals that I make for myself, and usually finish them". The average of the participants' responses in relation to the self-management questions of the Student Social Emotional Questionnaire is 3.763. This average shows that the group of participants generally feels highly skilled in self-management. The standard deviation of the

self-management questions is 0.447. Importantly, the standard deviation shows that students are generally consistent in their self-perception of this social-emotional skill. Like all of the other social-emotional competencies, the mode of this competency was 4. The median was 4, also. The range was two because no students scored less than 1. Generally, participants self-reported as highly skilled in this social-emotional competency.

For the questions relating to self management, 85% of participants scored their proficiency between 3 and 4, indicating a high proficiency. Thirteen percent of participants scored between 2 and 3. Only 2% of participants scored between 1 and 2. No participants indicated a score less than 1. It is important that no participants thought they were unskilled at self management, and that so many of the participants consider themselves highly skilled.

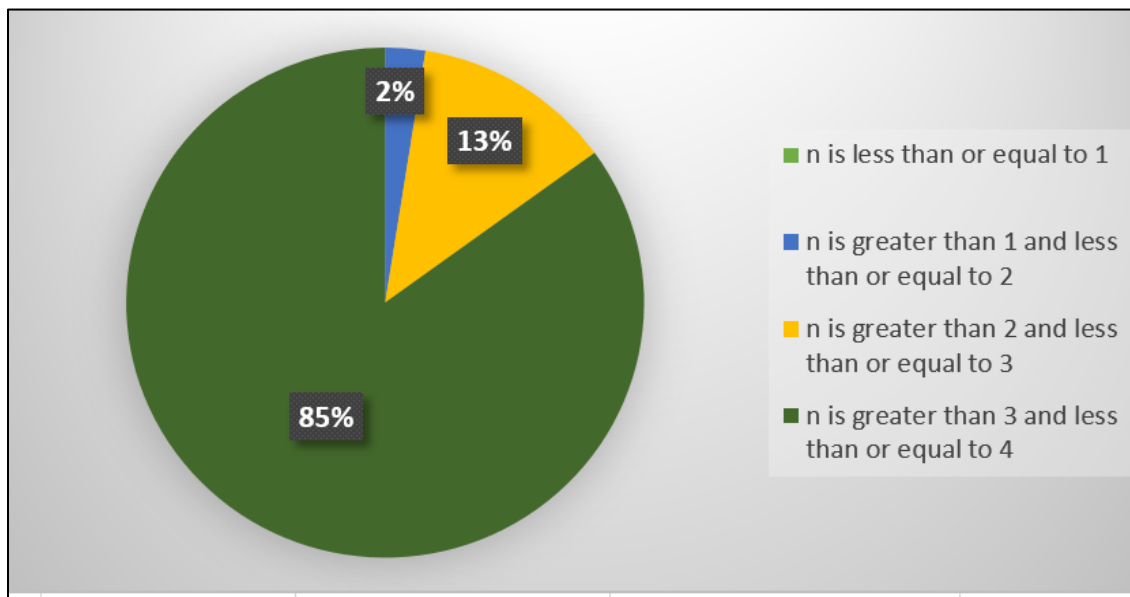


Figure 2. Self-management average.

### Social Awareness Results

Social Awareness was one of the five social-emotional competencies which produced outstanding data in the questionnaire. Questions 5 and 6 of the Student Social Emotional

Questionnaire address participants' social awareness. The statements which addressed social awareness on the questionnaire were "I know how to act around many different kinds of people" and "I know how to act in many different places". The average of the participants' responses to these two questions is 3.413, which is between "yes" and "yes a little". This is the smallest average in comparison to the other five main competencies measured in this questionnaire. The standard deviation of the self-awareness questions is 0.757. This was the most widely deviating group of data among the five competency averages. The mode was four, and the median was 3.74. The range was the widest possible in this study, 3. Though this competency had the smallest average of the five main social-emotional competencies, the mode and the median show that participants still generally self-reported as highly skilled in social awareness.

Participants indicated a wide range of social awareness skills. Sixty-eight percent of participants scored their proficiency between 3 and 4, indicating a high proficiency. Twenty-three percent of participants scored between 2 and 3. Seven percent of participants scored between 1 and 2. Two percent of participants indicated a score less than 1. This is the only social-emotional competency which produced questionnaire data which indicated participants' self-rating in all four of the score ranges. It was also one of the two social-emotional skills which has the least amount of participants to self-score between 3 and 4.

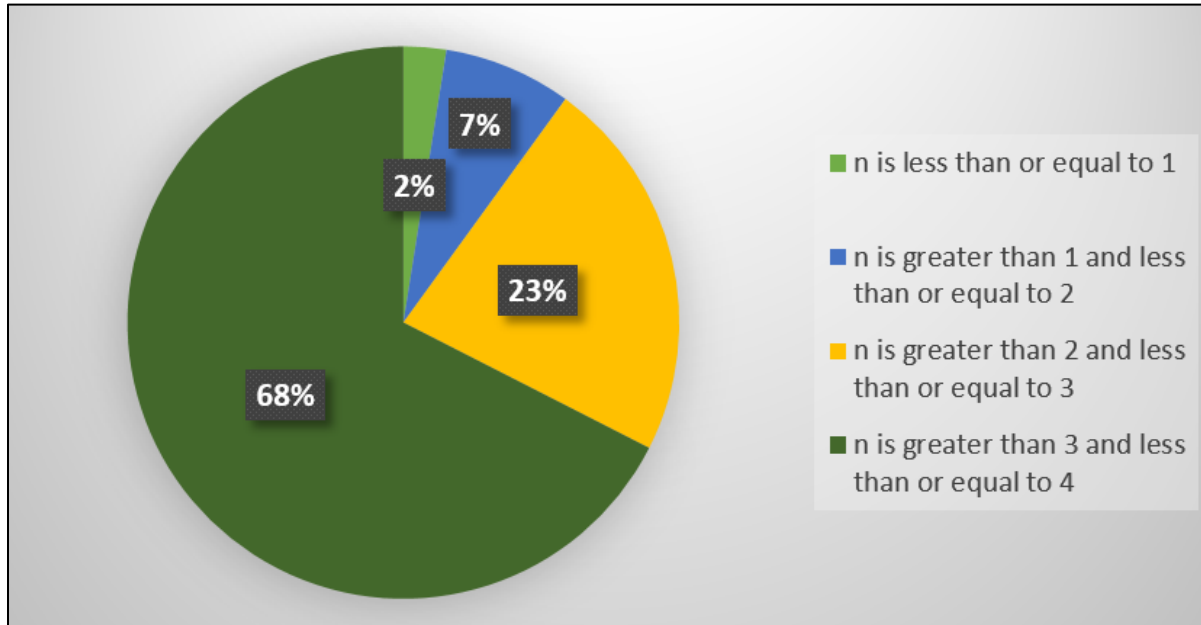


Figure 3. Social awareness average.

### Relationship Skills Results

Another social-emotional competency which produced unique data was Relationship Skills. Questions 7 and 8 of the Student Social Emotional Questionnaire address participants' relationship skills. These questions asked participants to self-report their skills by responding to these statements: "I think I have a lot of good friends" and "I know how to make friends with new people". The average of the participants' responses in relation to the relationship questions of the Student Social Emotional Questionnaire is 3.838. This average shows that the group of participants generally feels highly competent in relationship skills. This was the highest average of any of the five main social-emotional competencies. The standard deviation of the relationship skills questions is 0.324. This social emotional competency had the smallest standard deviation of the five main competencies. The range of this set of data is one, which echoes the findings of the standard deviation. The mode and the median are both four. The highly consistent data

which is also the highest average shows that this competency is one in which participants are especially skilled.

For the questions relating to relationship skills, 90% of participants scored their proficiency between 3 and 4. This shows many participants scored a high proficiency in this area. Ten percent of participants scored between 2 and 3. No participants scored below 2. This graph makes it clear that this social-emotional competency is similarly high across participants. It is especially important that zero participants self-reported in the ranges less than or equal to one or between 1 and 2. However unique it is that no participants reported below two, it is also unique how many participants scored between 3 and 4. Not only does this competency have the most participants in the 3 to 4 range, but it has 5% more participants in that range than the next highest competency, which means it is the highest scoring competency by a wide margin.

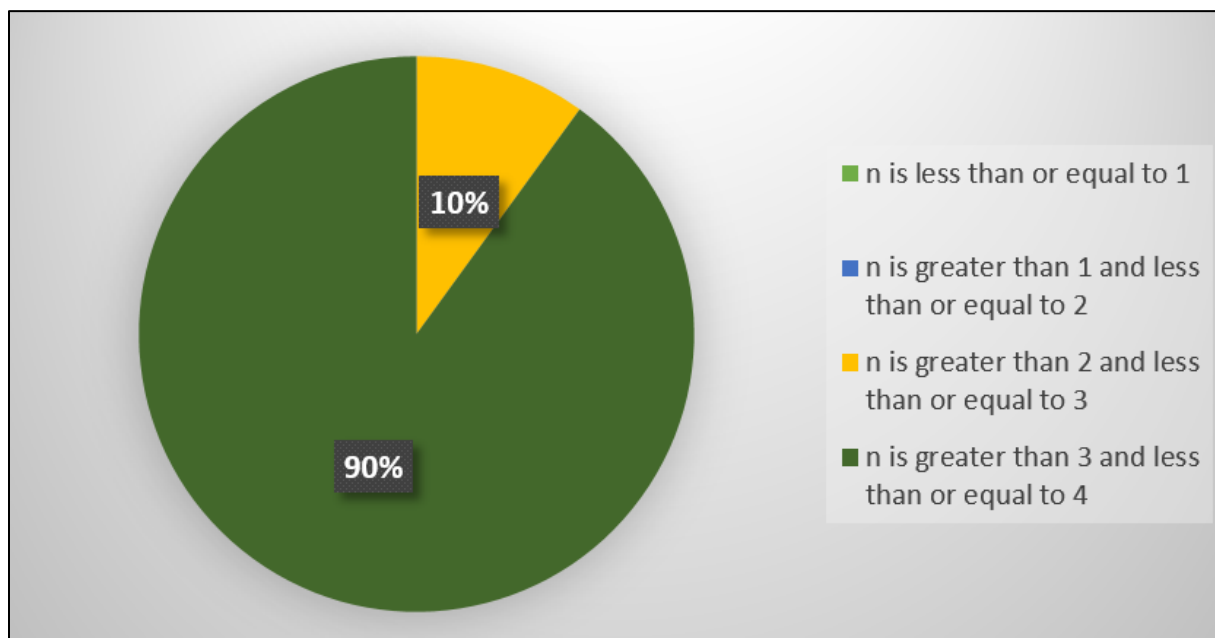


Figure 4. Relationship skills average.

### **Responsible Decision-Making Results**

Questions 9 and 10 of the Student Social Emotional Questionnaire address participants' skills related to responsible decision-making. The statements on the questionnaire which related to responsible decision-making are "In my family, I make decisions like the adults, not like the children" and "I think a lot about something before I do it." The average of the participants' responses to these two questions is 3.463, which is between "yes" and "yes a little". The standard deviation of the responsible decision-making questions is 0.616. The range of this set of data is two, despite the unremarkable standard deviation. Like all of the social-emotional competencies, four was the mode of this group of data. The median of this group is 3.5. Though this is a generally high median, it is one of the two social-emotional competencies which produced the lowest median. This average is the middle average of the five main competencies addressed in this study. It is also the middle standard deviation.

Though this social-emotional competency is produced the middle average and the middle standard deviation, the graph below provides a different perspective. Only 68% of participants scored their proficiency of responsible decision making skills between 3 and 4. Thirty percent of participants scored between 2 and 3. Two percent of participants scored between 1 and 2. No participants indicated a score less than 1. Though this group had no participants who self-reported as especially low, in the less than or equal to one group, it was one of the two social-emotional competencies with the least participants scoring between 3 and 4. The other social-emotional competency with only 68% of participants self-reporting between 3 and 4 was Social Awareness, which had the lowest overall average of all of the competencies. The Responsible Decision-Making results from the questionnaire show that this is the competency with the most

participants scoring between 2 and 3. There were 30% of participants who self-reported at scoring between 2 and 3. The competency with the next largest group of participants in this range was self-awareness, with 25% of participants in this range. This is unique, because it shows that this competency was not self-reported as particularly skilled or unskilled, unlike other competencies.

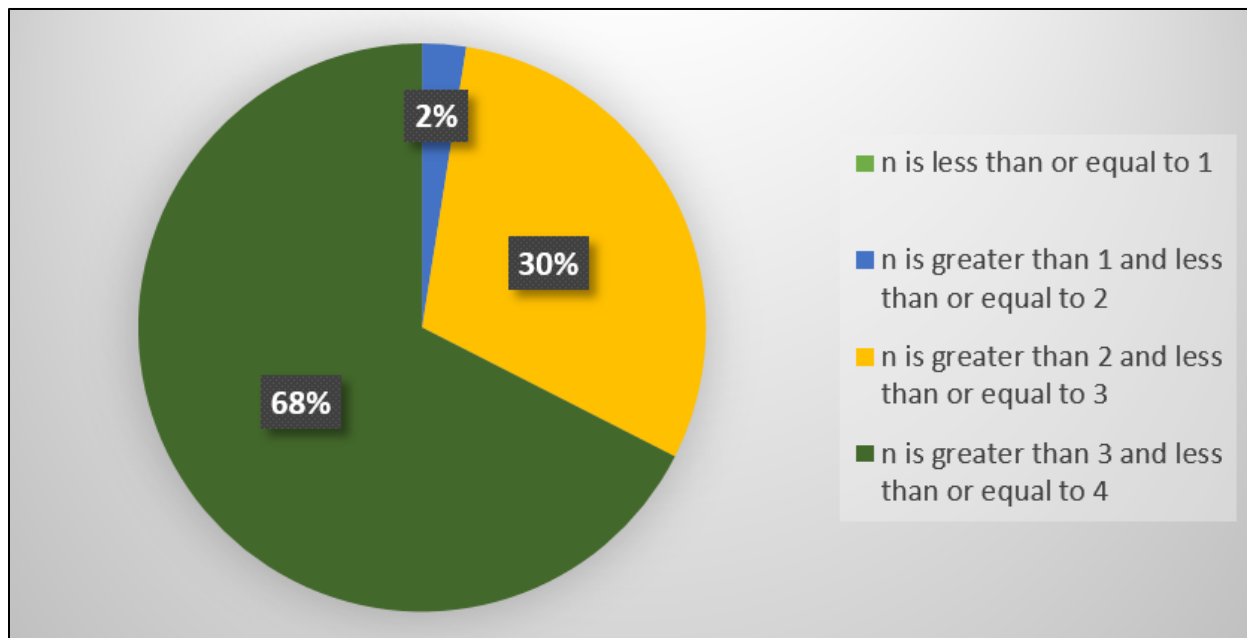


Figure 5. Responsible decision-making average.

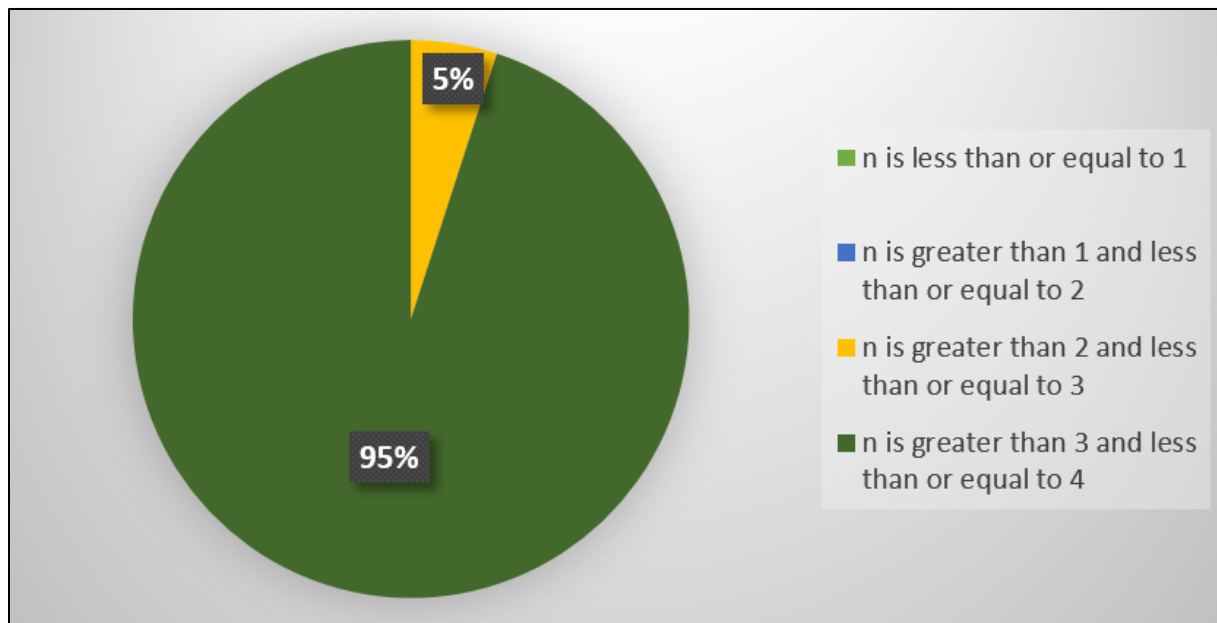
### Overall Results

The overall average of all the participants in all of the five main social emotional competencies is 3.580. This score indicates an average answer between “yes” and “yes a little”. The overall standard deviation is 0.5694. This shows a very close similarity between answers across participants. All five of the main social-emotional competencies had a mode of four, which showed that most participants self-rated as highly skilled across all competencies.

Overall, participants average score in all five main competencies of social-emotional skills show developed skills. Considering participants’ average scores in all five main social-



emotional competencies, 95% of participants scored between three and four. Only 5% of participants scored between 2 and 3 on average. No participants scored an average below 2. This reiterates that participants consistently self-reported as highly skilled across all of the social-emotional skills.



*Figure 6.* Overall average.

### **Interview Quotations**

The participant interviews provided insight into the questionnaire data. Forty participants answered Student Social Emotional Questionnaire. Of those participants, twelve were randomly selected to also participate in the Student Interview. The interview data presented several themes which relate to this study and help clarify, and in some cases complicate, the questionnaire data. The first theme I present here are examples provided by interviews which support the data presented in the questionnaire. The second theme is examples where participants independently produced exceptional social-emotional dialog. The next theme includes interview answers that do not support the questionnaire data. Then, I make special note of common themes that

repetitively showed up in answers. These common themes are mentioning academic skills, recognizing peers who have similar social, cultural, or physical traits as friends, and a expressing a sense of social separation. The interview data provides a clearer picture and more insight into the self-reported data supplied by the questionnaire.

**Examples which support questionnaire data.** Many students articulated examples which support the trends of the Student Social Emotional Questionnaire data. Many students noted that social or emotional skills were among the things they find easy to do. One student said it is easy to “be involved”, and another student said it’s easy to make new friends. Yet another student said a lot of activities are easy, such as spending time with family and friends, and talking to teachers.

Other students described times they used social or emotional skills to make responsible decisions. One student explained that his mother did not want to bring the family to the United States because she was scared. Because his parents were divorced and he is the oldest son, he felt it was his decision to make for the family. He had insisted that the move was “not easy, but very important” and with time, his mother “trusted him” and they traveled to America.

Some students expressed how they had set and accomplished meaningful goals. One woman talked about how her goals balanced personal life and academic life. When I asked about her goals, she said: “umm... in my life, when I get my two babies. My other goal is coming soon. Graduation”. Another student outlined her goals she has set and accomplished over time. She told me that her goal last academic year was to “have good GPA and grades”, this year her goal was to “take harder classes” and her goal for next year is to “take college classes”. She added,

“It’s just a goal – I haven’t reached it. I’m good at it. Not perfect! But good!”. Overall, many interview participants provided examples which supported their claims made in the questionnaire.

**Social-emotional dialog.** Some participants used unique or exceptionally insightful language to answer interview questions. I asked one participant to tell me about some places or people he acts differently around, how he acts, and why. He described in detail how he acts differently around different groups of people, and how his personal goals impact his social behavior. He reported that he is “more chatty” around groups of people, unless “I don’t want to be involved with what they doing”. In that case, he focuses on “knowing where I’m going” and changes his behavior. This student demonstrates his clear knowledge of Self-awareness and social awareness when he describes how he behaves purposefully different with different people, and his skills in Self-management and Responsible decision-making when he describes how his goals affect his decisions about interacting with friends. This student easily expressed an example of how he integrates his multitude of social-emotional competencies in an everyday interaction.

Another student’s response was different, but just as complete. When I asked her to tell about a time she acted differently she said, “I always act the same”. This participant self-reported an average of 4 in response to the social awareness statements on the questionnaire. I encouraged her to think about different situations and provided examples, but she insisted, “I usually like to be average. I’m still me”. Though this student did not answer the interview question exactly in the way it was posed, she still demonstrates a significant self-awareness and social awareness because she is able to describe how she acts and why, especially in relation to how her own self-awareness affects her social awareness and decision-making.

Many participants described relationships with exceptional social-awareness. One student described how he makes and keeps his friends: “we talk easily and help each other”. Another student said she and her best friend became close “because she was there for me in my hard situations and in my happiness”. One woman, whose father died when she was 11 years old, said her personal goal is “to take my mom to hajj because I love my mom. She is my father and also my mother”. These participants provide examples which demonstrate their complete understanding of how social awareness interact with relationship skills as well as self-managed goal setting.

Other participants squared their answers in the context of larger issues around them, which demonstrated an advanced understanding of social awareness. One student said she acts differently with people from different cultures, but was quick to add “I mean, I respect them”. Another student provided a widely encompassing example for something that is difficult: “un-respect”. One student said that a difficult decision she made was to “stand up for gay people”. She said her brother helped her make the decision, and added “now I start to stand up and tell people to be respectful”. These responses show how social awareness skills work together with other social emotional skills.

**Examples which do not support questionnaire data.** While the data provided by the Student Social Emotional Questionnaire generally suggests participants have strong social and emotional skills, some of the interview answers did not support that. Seven times participants were unable to provide an example of a social-emotional skill and had no elaboration as to why. Three participants did not know something that was difficult for them, one participant did not know an example of something that is easy, two participants did not have an example of an

important decision, and one participant did not know an example of people or places to act differently. This does not match the consistently high scores in all five competencies self-reported on the questionnaire.

Several interviews included a theme of participants reporting a goal, but not apparently understanding the steps to achieve the goal. One participant said his goal is to become a doctor. I asked what school he might attend to join the profession and he said “I have no idea”. Similarly, another student reported “I plan to be doctor when I finish high school” which does not recognize the gap of actions that occur between graduating high school and becoming a doctor. Another student told me his goal: “I want to go to college. I want to be a nurse”. However, at the time of the interview the participant was two weeks away from graduating high school and had not applied to any post-secondary schools. Likewise, one participant said his important decision is “going to college” because “I wanna help my family”. He, also, had not applied to any post-secondary school at that point, two weeks before graduation. These participants show only half of the questionnaire statement relating to self-management: “I have goals that I make for myself, and usually finish them”. Though these students have and can articulate ambitious goals, they are unlikely to finish them in they are unclear about the steps that need to occur in order to do so.

Interestingly, two participants expressed a social separation from decision making. When asked about an important decision she had made, one student said, “I don’t know. My teachers always choose me”. She clarified that her teachers in Africa and America were responsible for making decisions for her. Similarly, another student did not describe an important decision she had made, but said “family, teachers” help her make decisions and “I trust that wish”. Though these participants’ statements shows strong relationship skills because they trust the decisions of

teachers, and family members in their lives, they are is not demonstrating self-management skills or responsible decision-making skills because they aren't cooperating in creating or deciding on personal goals for their futures, nor do they seem aware how to identify choices that will make them happy in the future.

Some individual participants provided examples of questionnaire data not aligning with interview data. One individual participant self-reported 3.1 as her average proficiency across all five social-emotional competencies, but when interviewed did not provide examples which supported this moderately high score. She did not know something that was difficult for her, she couldn't think of any goals when prompted, she said "I have no idea" when asked about people or places she acts differently around, and she said "I have to think" but never provided an example when asked about an important decision. However, she did self-report an average score of 4 in Relationship Skills which was one interview question for which she provided a specific and detailed example which endorsed her questionnaire score. Another participant self-rated her Responsible Decision-making skills an average of four but when asked about an important decision said "I have no idea". Similarly, a different participant self-rated his Relationship Skills an average of four; he described having a lot of friends in Africa, but noted "I don't have a friend now". Comparing these participants' questionnaire data and interview data shows how some participants did not self-report consistently.

**Academic skills.** An interesting theme which emerged from interview data was a tendency for Somali SLIFE to refer to academic skills. Many subjects discussed academic skills when asked about social-emotional skills. Six participants noted an academic task or skill when asked to tell something that is easy for them. The school-related answers to that question

included “study the test”, “come to school”, “writing”, “everything, reading, writing”, “education”, and “work on lessons”. Two students noted academic skills as things that were difficult for them: “tests” and “math and English”. One student explicitly noted a goal is to graduate high school, but many students implied goals related to or require academic experiences throughout the interview. Another participant’s goal was to write “my first poem”, which she had completed and published with the help of a teacher. Though academic skills are factors in responsible decision-making and many participants’ goals discussed in relation to their self-management skills, these responses do not specifically demonstrate awareness of social-emotional competencies.

Many participants also shared about academic challenges and goals when they talked about an important decision they have faced. One participant noted his decision to attend school was an important decision: “I like to finish school because I want to learn something”. One student shared about how deciding to continue school with two babies at home was an important decision. Yet another participant noted that continuing school was an important decision “even though I was out of my age”. Despite being older than many of her classmates, and knowing she will not have time to graduate before she is too old to attend public schools, she still chooses to attend school because, she says, “I have a dream. I want to be educated person and end up somewhere good”. These examples show how academics are an important way participants integrate social-emotional skills in their lives daily.

**Similar friends.** Another theme that came up in interviews was that many participants noted traits in their friends that were similar to their own traits. Not only were many of the social traits similar among the friends they talked about, very often, the friend a participant described

was similar to themselves in multiple ways. Most of the participants described best friends who were also Somali, second language learners, and Muslim, like the participant. One participant explained: “We understand each other language. We become friends”. Another student told about a friend who lives in the same apartment building. Similarly, another said about her friends: “they’re always with me and go same place”. One student explained why her best friend serves as a good friend to her: “She knows about me because we had similar personalities and understood each other”. While participants are able to provide examples of meaningful relationships, which supports the questionnaire data related to the social-emotional competency of Relationship Skills, their description of friendships with socially similar peers does not support their self-reported Social Awareness skills. The questionnaire asks participants about knowing how to act around different people and in different places, but if they are interacting with similar peers, they are not demonstrating the strong social awareness skills they self-reported in the questionnaire.

One common reason for building deep friendships was that the friends help each other in school settings. Three participants explained that lending help was a main component of their friendship. One student told about her friend, “we met first day of school in Saint Paul.” Another student met his best friend on his first day in school when the friend offered him help. He noted that they still help each other today. The theme of helping is interesting. Helping integrates self-awareness because individuals recognize their own strengths or weaknesses when providing or receiving help. It also involves social awareness and relationship skills because peers take on new roles when providing or receiving help. That helping is a factor in defining friendship also



shows responsible decision-making because individuals who build friendships around peers who are helpful are making mature decisions that are based on a meaningful foundation.

**Social separation.** Many students also described social separation or lack of social mobility when talking about their best friends during the interview. Two participants said they do not have any best friends. Another participant said she has no friends in America, but “a lot of friends in Africa”. One student told me he finds it difficult to navigate joining sports teams. He wants to join the soccer team, but did not know how to build the social connections necessary to be part of that social group. These participants are describing social isolation or limitations which do not align with the self-reported data provided by the questionnaire.

### **Summary of Results**

In summary, the questionnaire data demonstrated that Somali SLIFE self-rated themselves as having high competence in social and emotional skills. The participants' questionnaire responses to the self-awareness questions produced an average competency score of 3.425. Their responses to the self-management questions produced an average score of 3.763. The average score for the social awareness questions was 3.413. This was the smallest average of all the social-emotional competencies included in this study. It was also the widest standard deviation. Relationship skills questions produced an average score of 3.838. The relationship skills questions produced the highest average among the competencies included on the questionnaire. It was also the social-emotional competency with the least standard deviation. The average of the responsible decision-making questions was 3.463. All of the five main social-emotional competencies produced an average score between “yes” and “yes a little”, which

shows that participants rated themselves competent across all five skills. The average of all five competencies included in the questionnaire was 3.580.

The interviews produced interesting data as well. Several themes surfaced from the group of interviews. Some of the interviews produced examples which supported the questionnaire data. Participants provided meaningful examples of social-emotional skills which echoed their self-reported questionnaire scores which suggest they are highly competent in the skills. Moreover, some participants engaged in exemplar social-emotional dialog which demonstrated high competency and independent reflection relating to multiple domains of social-emotional skills. However, some interviews provided examples which do not support the data collected from the questionnaire. For example, some participants self-reported as highly competent in one or many areas of social-emotional skills, but were unable to provide an example which demonstrates their high competency. Another theme that was exposed in the interview data was students' trend of discussing academic skills when prompted to discuss social-emotional skills. Participants also frequently provided examples of friendships with individuals who identified similarly to the participant, and a sense of social separation. Both of these social themes do not align with the data collected from the questionnaire.

The results of this study are similar to the Mayberry and Kalenze (2017) study. Both sets of data demonstrate high social-emotional competency of Somali participants. In Mayberry and Kalenze (2017) study, "Somali American Students are the highest performing group in the district on the non-academic measures of success". Both studies found that Somali participants self-reported the social-emotional competency related to belonging in social relationships as the most competent skill. The results of Mayberry and Kalenze (2017) study also show that Somali

participants reported a high value and commitment to education and learning. This value was thematic in the interview data of this study.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter interprets the results presented in the previous chapter. It also discusses possible implications of the study. Limitations of the study, as well as recommendations for future research, will also be presented. In the results section, I presented the self-reported data Somali SLIFE described in terms of the five main social-emotional skills (CASEL, 2017). In the discussion section, I will present possible reasons for their reports, as well as implications of social-emotional skills of Somali SLIFE. This chapter will discuss questionnaire results in relation to each of the five main social-emotional competencies (CASEL, 2017). Qualitative data drawn from the interviews will be used to clarify and elaborate the discussion. Together, the questionnaire and interview data will be used to describe the skill Somali SLIFE self-report in each of the five main domains of Social-Emotional competency.

### Self-Awareness

The average of the participants' responses to questions 1 and 2 of the Student Social Emotional Questionnaire is 3.425, which is between "yes" and "yes a little". This response shows participants self-reported a high degree of self-awareness. The standard deviation of the self-awareness questions is 0.703, which shows the group was similar in their responses. However, some of the interview responses complicate this data. The interview question which addressed self-awareness asked "Tell me an example of something that is easy for you to do well. Tell me an example of something that is difficult for you." Though the questionnaire data showed a high level of proficiency, 4 of the 11 interview participants were not able to demonstrate the proficiency. Three participants did not know something that was difficult for them, one participant did not know an example of something that is easy.

Moreover, interview questions which addressed other social-emotional competencies did not align with questionnaire data. This discrepancy shows a lack of self-awareness because the participants are reporting that a skill is proficient, but not able to demonstrate proficiency in that skill. For example, participants reported high self-management skills in the questionnaire, but many could not describe the details of their goals in the interview. Likewise, 3 of the 11 participants noted in their interviews that they had no friends, even though relationship skills was the highest competency reported in the questionnaire. Because the examples provided in the interview data do not consistently align with the self-reported questionnaire data, it is evident that participants might not be as self-aware as they report.

### **Self-Management**

The average of the participants' responses in relation to the self-management questions of the Student Social Emotional Questionnaire is 3.763. This average shows that the group of participants generally has a sense that they're highly skilled in self-management, because the average is close to the "yes" answer. The standard deviation of the self-management questions is 0.447, which shows that the group's answers are very similar.

Some interviews provided examples of self-management competencies which support the questionnaire data. One woman talked about how her goals balance her personal life, including her two babies, and academic life, including her upcoming graduation. Another student outlined her goals she has set and accomplished over 3 years' time, also noting her proficiency and rational for completing each goal.

However, some of the interview data complicates the questionnaire report. The interview question which addresses self-management asks, "Tell me a goal you made for yourself. Did

you accomplish the goal?” Though some participants had accomplished their goal, 4 of the 11 participants were able to identify a goal, but did not know the steps to take to accomplish the goal.

### **Social Awareness**

The average of the participants’ responses to the two questions pertaining to social awareness is 3.413, which is between “yes” and “yes a little”. In comparison to the other five main competencies measured in this questionnaire, this competency has the smallest average score. The standard deviation of the self-awareness questions is 0.757. The group of social awareness responses was the most widely differing group of data among the five competency averages.

Although participants scored their competency in social awareness as generally proficient, it is important to recognize that it is the lowest scoring competency in relation to the other competencies, as well as most widely differing. Perhaps part of the reason this group reported lower scores in this competency is because, as SLIFE, they all experienced a lack of formal education. Important social learning happens in school-related settings where “youth build friendships, learn how to negotiate disagreements, and develop the social skills that will support them as members of a diverse society” (Mahalingappa et al., 2017, p. 57).

It might not only be the lack of school-related social experienced that cause Somali SLIFE to report a low proficiency in social awareness, but also a disconnection from unknown or new social conventions. The reception of SLIFE to a new community may affect how they fill social roles. SLIFE may be minorities within a new community, which can cause them to not trust prevailing social structures. This distrust can lead them to disengage with social roles

(Bigelow, 2010, p. 148). In such a situation, it is very important that schools fill social gaps. Hos (2014) underscores the role of school settings in social-emotional learning: “Schools, in most cases, are the primary contexts through which refugee children learn about and are socialized to their relocation community” (p. 480). It is possible that lack of school-context socialization and explicit education and experience with social norms is why the participants scored this competency low.

### **Relationship Skills**

Of the portion of the questionnaire which related to relationship skills, the average of the participants’ responses is 3.838. This average shows that the group of participants generally self-reports as highly competent in relationship skills. This was the highest average of any of the five main social-emotional competencies. The standard deviation of the relationship skills questions is 0.324. This social emotional competency had the smallest standard deviation of the five main competencies.

Though the Somali SLIFE scored all of the competencies as quite proficient, relationship skills stood out as the most homogenous and highly scored group. Somali culture puts value on community and the relationships and roles within their community (Farid & McMahan, 2004). This cultural trait might be a factor which contributed to the report of high competency in relationship skills. This cultural value of community might also be a reason why many of the interviews included reports of friendships with individuals who are similar to the participant. Often, the friend the participant described shares the same religious, race, or ethnic community as the participant.

However, despite relationship skills being the highest scoring competency on the questionnaire, there was some discrepancy in the interviews. Three of the 11 participants expressed a lack of friendship in their everyday life. One participant mentioned that he finds it difficult to navigate joining sports teams. He wants to join the soccer team, but did not know how to build the social connections necessary to be part of that social group. The behaviors described in some of the interviews align with Dodds et al. (2010) while the data demonstrated by the questionnaire aligns with the cultural norms described by Farid and McMahan (2004). It is evident that SLIFE may also experience an interruption of social relationships.

### **Responsible Decision-Making**

The average of the participants' responses to the responsible decision-making Student Social Emotional Questionnaire questions is 3.463. This response indicates that the participants interpret themselves as between "yes" and "yes a little" competent in responsible decision-making skills. The standard deviation of the responsible decision-making questions is 0.616. Though the average and standard deviation do not stand out among the other competencies included in the questionnaire, the response demonstrates a fairly strong agreement among the participants that they have quality decision-making skills.

The interview data supports the questionnaire data. Participants used thoughtful and thorough language to describe how and why they used social-emotional intelligences when making decisions. Some of the decisions described included situations where the participants were a factor in deciding major decisions for their families, such as whether they should immigrate to America or attend school while parenting children at home.



## Overall

The questionnaire provided a clear answer about Somali SLIFE's self-perception of their own social-emotional skills. The overall average of all the participants in all five main social emotional competencies is 3.580. This score indicates an average answer between "yes" and "yes a little". Overall, the questionnaire showed participants view themselves as highly competent across the five main social emotional skills. The overall standard deviation is 0.5694. This shows a very close similarity between answers across participants. The mode score across all five social-emotional competencies was four. The range was three, which means participants' self-reported the widest range possible. Overall, the questionnaire data showed clearly that Somali SLIFE participants view their own social-emotional skills as highly developed.

Many of the interview participants offered examples and explanations which enforced the results of the questionnaire. For example, when students were asked for an example of something that is easy for them to do well, many students naturally described social-emotional skills or tasks, such as making friends, and talking to teachers. Some students demonstrated exceptional awareness of social-emotional skills in their answers. For example, one participant described how he acts around different groups of people (social-awareness), and how his goals (self-management) lead him to make decisions about how to act. He noted that when his peers are participating in behaviors he doesn't want to be associated with (responsible decision making) he focuses on "knowing where I'm going" (self-awareness) to make the best decision for himself. It is clear from this one example that this student does exhibit developed skills in multiple social-emotional competencies.

These results align with Mayberry and Kalenze (2017) study in which Somali American students reported higher social-emotional competency than their free or reduced lunch eligible, and African American peers in every category. However, the findings do not align with Dodds et al. (2010) study which Somali students' self-perceptions were compared with "disadvantaged" and "advantaged" peer groups. Somali students rated their social-emotional skills lower than both peer groups. SLIFE demonstrate unique traits, such as "having goals, resourcefulness, curiosity, and a vision for better life" (Hos, 2014, p. 482). Perhaps these assets are a factor in Somali SLIFE's high social-emotional competency displayed in this study.

### **Limitations**

There were various limitations to this study that will be discussed in this section. One limitation was sample size. The research question focused on a very narrow, specific portion of the student population. This was helpful in distinguishing the traits of this unique group, but not helpful in providing ample participants. Though 40 participants are enough to produce meaningful data, a larger group of participants would make the study more generalizable. Moreover, perhaps including participants who attend different area schools, or participants from broader communities or states would help limit additional factors. Additionally, only twelve of the questionnaire participants also completed the interview. Conducting more interviews would help to provide more clarity to the questionnaire data. Certainly, a larger group of participants would allow for stronger data.

Another limitation is the participants' comprehension of the questions and their English proficiency in responses. Though questions were presented in simplified English, and translation or interpretation were available to participants, the amount that language barriers affected data is

ambiguous. The questions were presented in a Likert style scale with simple phrases indicating each mark on the scale, but the unfamiliar format of the scale might have caused participants to be confused or answer inaccurately. The clarity of the questionnaire tool might have affected the validity of the questionnaire data.

Perhaps one limitation of this study is the nature of how data was reported. Participants self-reported their own skills. This might have included an inflation of self-perception which would skew the data. Although the interviews help to identify or clarify some of the participants' warped self-reports in the questionnaire, the interview itself is also a tool which depended on participants' accurate self-reporting. These tools collected participants' personal reflection and reporting, but did not include any observation of actual behaviors. Because this study only included data collection tools which depended on participants' self-reported data, a multitude of other factors might have affected the reliability of the data.

An additional limitation of this study is the relationship I, the researcher, have with the participants. I am a teacher at the school all the participants attend. Many of the participants were at one time students in my classroom. Some participants were currently students in my classroom at the time of data collection. Still, other participants had never been students in my classroom, but likely had seen me around the school, or identified me as a teacher role. The participants' existing relationship to me might have affected their willingness to participate in the study, and the honesty with which they answered the self-reported questionnaire or interview questions. Though the Consent to Participate form, which all participants signed, states that participation will not affect their relationship to the researcher and will not affect their grades, participants

might have engaged in the study with those factors in mind. Surely, participants' behavior might have been affected by the researcher and the participants' teacher-student relationship.

Yet another limitation of this study is the surface nature of the questions in relation to the complexity of each of the five main social emotional competencies addressed in this study. Each of the five main competencies is broad and encompasses a multitude of knowledges, behaviors, cultural norms, and developmental stages. The two questions on the questionnaire and one question on the interview do not fully encompass the multiple facets of each of the skills. The time management of data collection, the scope and size of the study, as well as the English language proficiency of the participants were factors which limited this study's ability to broadly and deeply explore each of the five main social-emotional competencies. Clearly, this study does not completely address the various aspects of each of the five main social-emotional competencies.

One more limitation of this study is that there are very few studies that are similar. Because of the multiple social facets of the participants, there are few comparable study which includes participants that are comparable to those involved in this study. Some studies included participants that were in many ways similar to the participants in this study, but do not represent all of the key traits of this participant group. For example, Dodds et al. (2010) conducted a study which provided information about social-emotional self-perceptions of Somali participants, but the participants were elementary students, and children of refugees – not refugees themselves. Likewise, Straley's (2016) study included secondary SLIFE in Minnesota, but the participants were Latin American—not Somali. Though these studies helped as comparisons and examples for

this study, they were not exactly accurate companions because the participants were not entirely the same.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study serves as a starting place from which a variety of interesting research questions could be studied. Because this study included a small amount of participants from a single school, future research could expand to a larger group of participants from other schools in order to produce more data pertinent to this research question. This would produce more accurate data, as well as results that are more generalizable. It would also be valuable to conduct research which provides a comparison group with which the researcher could validate and elaborate the Somali SLIFE responses. For example, another study could inquire the social-emotional skills Somali SLIFE exhibit in class as reported by teachers of Somali SLIFE. Similarly, this study could be replicated with non-Somali SLIFE, or non-SLIFE Somali participants, for example, in order to focus on specific traits of the participants.

A lot of contradicting data was produced from the interviews. Some of the interviews produced incredibly insightful and complete examples of how individuals utilize social-emotional skills. These data supported the data from the questionnaire. Other interviews demonstrated individuals' inability to express or exhibit examples of social-emotional competence. These data points contradict the data provided by the questionnaire. Only twelve participants were included in interviews. It would be valuable to replicate the study with more interviews in order to clarify and complete the data set. Additionally, the interview only posed five questions, one for each of the social-emotional competencies. Certainly, one question does not provide enough opportunity to fully expound upon the multitude of skills related to each of

the competencies. It would also be valuable to expand the interview process in order to begin to grapple with participants' skills in relation to the other aspects of each of the five main competences. Perhaps including more participants and more opportunities in the interview would help to elaborate on and clarify the conclusions made in this study.

Further research might also dig into how Somali SLIFE's strong social-emotional skills can impact and support academic learning. Educators and researchers could use this study as a starting place to find how social-emotional skills of Somali SLIFE can be leveraged and supported in order to create positive learning growth. One could also do more research into how social-emotional skills and education affects non-Somali SLIFE in the classroom. Further studies on this topic could also help to inform and combat teachers' biases by calling attention of schools and educators to other skills our students have but are not always assessed or rewarded. Possibly, further studies could help Somali SLIFE in and out of the classroom by better understanding their strengths in social-emotional competencies.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

Social-emotional skills are important when considering who students are, how they learn, and how they fit into social groups in and out of school. Somali SLIFE are a unique subgroup of learners with distinct social-emotional skills (Hos, 2014; Francis et al., 2006). These students might have experienced personal situations which affect their learning (Benseman, 2014, p. 18). They might have also witnessed familial or situational disruptions which can impact their social and emotional health (Seddon, 2015, p. 52). According to DeCapua et al. (2009), when considering the education of SLIFE, “it is often necessary to address emotional needs before the academic ones” (p. 33).

Because of the importance of social and emotional skills in the education of Somali SLIFE, this study sought to learn more about Somali SLIFE’s social-emotional skills. This study asked 40 Somali SLIFE who attend a secondary school in Minnesota about their self-perceptions of their own skills relative to the five main competencies of social-emotional skills. The five main competencies, described by CASEL (2017), are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. All participants answered two questions about each competency, using a Likert style scale to rate their competency. Twelve students also participated in a survey to elaborate on their answers.

Overall, the questionnaire showed the participants reflected a high proficiency across all five main competency. The average of all the questions in all five categories was 3.580, which indicates between “yes” and “yes a little”. The highest individual competency was relationship skills. The average of these questionnaire questions was 3.838, with 4 meaning “yes”. The second highest competency was self-management. This average was 3.763. The next highest

competency was responsible decision making. This competency's average was 3.463. The last two competency had very similar averages. Self-awareness had an average of 3.425, and social awareness had an average of 3.413. All of the competencies had an average between "yes" and "yes a little". This shows a high proficiency across all five main competencies of social-emotional skills.

Participant interviews mostly supported the data shown by the questionnaire. Many interviews provided examples which demonstrate proficiency in each aspect of social-emotional skills. Some participants even provided exceptional examples which described how they utilize multiple different social or emotional skills in one situation. For example, one student described goals she has had and accomplished over the years, which demonstrates great self-management. Additionally, and unprompted, she assessed her own ability to achieve each goal, which shows she is using self-awareness skills when considering self-management tasks. However, some interviews did not align with the questionnaire data. Some participants could not provide an example of a social-emotional skill. For example, participants generally score their relationship skills their highest competency, but multiple participants revealed in the interview that they have no friends.

The findings of this study align with another similar study completed by Mayberry and Kalenze (2017) but shows different findings than a study completed by Dodds et al. (2010). This study shows that Somali SLIFE have significant social-emotional skills which can be used to support their learning. However, further studies which include a larger participant group or students from different geographical location will help to clarify and generalize the findings of this study.



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### Appendix A: Student Personal Identifiers Survey

Please answer these questions about your personal identity. Your personal information will remain confidential. It will be used to affirm your eligibility in this study and correlate data.

Write your answer on the line

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_

First language: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years in the United States: \_\_\_\_\_

**Circle** just one answer.

Did you start school in the United States <b>before grade 6</b> ?	YES	NO
Do you speak mostly <b>English at home</b> ?	YES	NO
Did you go to school for <b><u>9 years</u></b> or more?	YES	NO
Did you go to school for 9 years <b><u>without stopping</u></b> ?	YES	NO
Can you <b>read and write</b> in your first language?	YES	NO

## Appendix B: Student Social Emotional Questionnaire

Respond to the sentence. If the sentence tells about you, circle **Yes**. If the sentence is mostly like you, circle **a little yes**. If the sentence is mostly not like you, circle **a little no**. If the sentence is not at all like you, circle **No**. Choose only the best one answer for you.

### Self-awareness:

I can easily describe my personality.

*Yes ----- a little yes -----a little no -----No*

I know what activities I am good at doing.

*Yes ----- a little yes -----a little no -----No*

### Self-management:

I know how to make myself happy.

*Yes ----- a little yes -----a little no -----No*

I have goals that I make for myself, and usually finish them.

*Yes ----- a little yes -----a little no -----No*

### Social awareness:

I know how to act around many different kinds of people.

*Yes ----- a little yes -----a little no -----No*

I know how to act in many different places.

*Yes ----- a little yes -----a little no -----No*

## Relationship skills:

I think I have a lot of good friends.

*Yes ----- a little yes -----a little no -----No*

I know how to make friends with new people.

*Yes ----- a little yes -----a little no -----No*

## Responsible decision-making:

In my family, I make decisions like the adults, not like the children.

*Yes ----- a little yes -----a little no -----No*

I think a lot about something before I do it.

*Yes ----- a little yes -----a little no -----No*

## Appendix C: Student Interview

Student interview questions:

### *Self-awareness*

1. Tell me an example of something that is easy for you to do well. Tell me an example of something that is difficult for you?

### *Self- management*

2. Tell me a goal you made for yourself. Did you accomplish the goal?

### *Social awareness*

3. Tell me about some places or people you act differently around. How do you act? Why?

### *Relationship skills*

4. Tell me about your best friend. How did you become good friends?

### *Responsible decision making*

5. Tell me about an important decision you made. What helped you decide?



## Appendix D: IRB Approval



### Institutional Review Board (IRB)

720 4th Avenue South AS 210, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

**Name:** Lauren Thoma  
**Email:** lbthoma@stcloudstate.edu

### IRB PROTOCOL DETERMINATION: Expedited Review-1

**Project Title:** Social-Emotional Skills of Somali Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education

**Advisor** Choonkyong Kim

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol to conduct research involving human subjects. Your project has been: **APPROVED**

Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:

- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of participants in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).

- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.

-Exempt review only requires the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.

- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.

- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

If we can be of further assistance, feel free to contact the IRB at 320-308-4932 or email ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu and please reference the SCSU IRB number when corresponding.

**IRB Chair:**

Dr. Benjamin Witts  
Associate Professor- Applied Behavior Analysis  
Department of Community Psychology, Counseling, and Family Therapy

**IRB Institutional Official:**

Dr. Latha Ramakrishnan  
Interim Associate Provost for Research  
Dean of Graduate Studies

#### OFFICE USE ONLY

<b>SCSU IRB#</b> 1818 - 2322	<b>Type:</b> Expedited Review-1	<b>Today's Date:</b> 5/21/2018
<b>1st Year Approval Date:</b> 5/21/2018	<b>2nd Year Approval Date:</b>	<b>3rd Year Approval Date:</b>
<b>1st Year Expiration Date:</b> 5/20/2019	<b>2nd Year Expiration Date:</b>	<b>3rd Year Expiration Date:</b>