

# *The Effect of Parent-child Relationships on the Social and Emotional Competence of Elementary School Students in the Lower School Grades*

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**Abstract:** Over the years, social and emotional competence has received much attention as a key competence for the social development of individuals. The level of social and emotional competence has gradually become an important indicator for assessing students' personal social adaptability and well-being in life. Based on the global report of Social and Emotional Competence Measurement released by OECD in 2021, understanding parents and a good parent-child relationship will promote the development of social and emotional competence of primary and secondary school students to a certain extent. Under the educational background of home-school-society co-education, family education has become an important part of education. Research shows that a harmonious family atmosphere is more conducive to the healthy development of children's physical and mental health. Moreover, lower elementary school students are in the transition period and have the psychological characteristics of preschool children, such as insecurity, judgment, emotional instability, etc., which require more attention and guidance from parents, teachers, and society. This study analyzes relevant literature to investigate the influence of the parent-child relationship on the social and emotional competence of lower elementary school students and develops parent-child activities for the five major competencies of social and emotional competence.

**Keywords:** Parent-child relationship, lower elementary school students, social and emotional competence

## 1. Introduction

Social-emotional competence is a core competence that promotes students' individual adaptive and social development, and it is a key competence that enhances students' sense of belonging to the campus and their sense of well-being in life. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization clearly states that "education should pay more attention to the development of children's social-emotional competencies for sustainable development." In home-school co-education, a positive and positive parent-child relationship will have a favorable impact on home-school co-education. Lower elementary school students are in the transition stage from kindergarten to elementary school, and their psychological development is on the basis of the psychological characteristics of preschool children, possessing the characteristics of the psychological development of preschool children, and needing the guidance of teachers and parents more. A good parent-child

relationship will enhance the self-efficacy and mental health of elementary school students. Family education plays a key role in children's development of social-emotional competence. Meanwhile, individual social-emotional competence has increasingly become the focus of academic research in today's changing times. The shortcomings of elementary school students' socio-emotional competence are also a challenge facing domestic education in the comprehensive deepening of reform.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Domestic Studies**

#### **2.1.1. Social and Emotional Competence of Primary School Students**

Prior to 2012, social-emotional competencies were mostly referred to as non-intellectual factors or emotional competencies, and most of the literature argued for the relevance of parenting styles to such competencies through discursive analyses. In 2012, the United Nations Educational Foundation (UNEF) and China's Education Joint Cooperation (EJC) launched the project "Social Emotional Learning", hereafter referred to as SEL, which began in 2019. Moreover, in the OECD's Study on Social and Emotional Skills (hereinafter referred to as SSES) in China, which began in 2019, a research team headed by Yuan Zhenguo of East China Normal University launched the first round of assessment in hundreds of primary and secondary schools in Suzhou, resulting in a research Series of Reports. Survey Report on Social-Emotional Competence of Elementary School Students discusses how to cultivate elementary school students' social-emotional competence, and establishes a path of home-school-social co-education with "school as the foundation, family as the focus, and community as the supplement" [1]. "Research on Social-Emotional Status and Countermeasures of Primary School Students" analyzes and summarizes the process, content, and practice of children's social-emotional competence, takes elementary school students as the object of research, adopts questionnaires and interviews as the research method, discovers the problems of elementary school students' social-emotional competence, and gives targeted countermeasures to improve it [2]. Meanwhile, "On the Value, Content and Cultivation Path of Social-Emotional Education for Preschool Children" studies the cultivation of children's social-emotional competence in preschool education and advocates that all parties in society make joint efforts to the formation of children's social-emotional competence [3].

#### **2.1.2. Parent-Child Relationship**

Parent-child relationships originated in genetics at first, referring to the biological blood relationship between offspring, and were later introduced into the fields of education and psychology. Each parent-child relationship may have different degrees of influence on the child's physiology and psychology. Currently, scholars pay more attention to the interaction relationship between parents and children. In all kinds of research on the cultivation of students' social and emotional competence, family factors are often important factors affecting the cultivation of students' social and emotional competence. The theory of family function points out that family is an important place for the physical and mental development of individuals, and if the basic functions of the family are not realized in the process of operation, it is very easy to cause a series of mental health problems among family members [4]. With the ever-changing social and economic development of the current society, the parenting styles in the family are also changing. In the Report on the Developmental Level of Social and Emotional Competence of Chinese Adolescents - based on the data of the second round of SSES assessment, it is pointed out that parents' conduct shows a positive correlation with students' social and emotional competence [5]. Understanding parents are more able to promote the development of children's social and emotional competence. In "Parent-Child Interaction and the Development of

Children's Theory of Mind", it was studied in detail that the development of children's theory of mind cannot be separated from the influence of the parent-child relationship [6]. The development of children's psychological theories is accompanied by the involvement of parent-child interaction. Therefore, the closeness of the parent-child relationship is inextricably linked to parenting style. Studies have shown that parental emotional warmth is effective in increasing the closeness of parent-child relationships [7].

## **2.2. International Research**

### **2.2.1. Social and Emotional Competence**

There has been a trend of gradual development and continuous refinement of the conceptual framework of social and emotional competence. For example, in the literature on the investigation of social-emotional competence in 2023, the authors used the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) and the Social-Emotional Developmental Assessment (SEDA) to examine children's behavior and social-emotional competence [8]. Denham, an expert in the study of children's social-emotional competence, proposed that preschoolers' social-emotional competence consists of the following components: self-regulation, emotional competence, social problem-solving, and relationship skills [9]. Collie argues that social and emotional competence operates through three components: basic psychological needs satisfaction (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), and autonomous motivation and behavior. In this model, these three components form an iterative process of social and emotional competence development [10]. A complete explanation is also given in the context of the long-standing controversy over Western scholars' definition of Social and Emotional Competence (SEC): the effective management of personal and interpersonal social and emotional experiences in a way that promotes the flourishing of self and others. Western scholars have paid much attention to the social-emotional competence of young children, and their studies have shown that young children who have a good relationship with and are supported by their parents are more likely to establish social and emotional relationships with their peers and that good communication builds a bridge of intimacy between parent and child [11].

### **2.2.2. Parent-Child Relationship**

The research on parent-child relationships in foreign countries has developed earlier, and the scope of research is wider and involves a wider range, including divorce parent-child relationship, corporate punishment parent-child relationship, parent-child relationship emotional, perceived parent-child relationship, parenting style parent-child relationship, and so on. In 2000, Western scholars Boutelle et al. pointed out the influence of parent-child relationship in the development of children's emotional functioning and regulation, and a large number of studies focused on parent-child attachment [12]. Meanwhile, scholars Lanjekar et al. concluded in their literature combing on the impact of parenting styles and parent-child relationships on children's cognitive development that parenting styles and parent-child relationships would be related to family care, adolescent and parenting support, and children's mental health. Positive parenting styles can help children face non-social or social problems. Positive parenting is needed for early childhood cognitive development, emotional balance, and maturation of the mind. The development of socio-emotional competence is inextricably linked to the development of cognitive development and emotional competence in children [13].

### **2.3. Relationship Between Parent-child Relationship and Social and Emotional Competence of Elementary School Students in the Lower School Grades**

According to domestic and international research on parent-child relationships, it has been found that, like parenting styles, parent-child relationships play a key role in children's healthy physical and mental development. Lower primary school students have not yet fully adapted to school life in elementary school, and their attachment to their parents is higher than that in other school segments, so the degree of closeness and detachment of parent-child relationship has a greater impact on the physical and mental development of lower primary school students. Parents almost assume the role of the early enlightenment teacher of children. On such a basis, positive parenting styles and close parent-child relationships promote the formation of children's abilities in various areas. Social-emotional competence, as a soft skill, positively contributes to students' academic achievement, socialization development, mental health level, and suppression of undesirable behaviors [14]. The atmosphere of the family, as a nurturing environment for students' social and emotional competence, always influences students' self-assessment, encompassing the level of self-esteem and psychological health [15]. A good family atmosphere is more likely to enable students to have a good sense of self-efficacy. Therefore, a good parent-child relationship creates a good family atmosphere to a certain extent, which promotes students' socialization development, and cognitive level, and has a favorable impact on students' social and emotional competence.

## **3. Roles of Parties in Parent-Child Activities**

### **3.1. Participants**

Parent-child activities are an important part of family education. Parent-child education is not just a one-way education from parents to children, but an educational opportunity and an educational atmosphere created in one parent-child interaction. The psychological characteristics of younger elementary school students are built on the foundation of preschool children and have developed. They have a vague sense of rules, lack the ability to learn actively, have poor emotional control, have a high degree of attachment to their parents, and need the attention of parents and teachers. During the actual activities, parents should take time to participate in them wholeheartedly and interact closely with their children. Only when parents are involved in and willing to support parent-child activities can a close parent-child relationship be established, which is conducive to the development of the child's social and emotional skills of openness and interaction.

### **3.2. Facilitators**

Parent-child activities for elementary school students are generally fun and interactive games with the family as the unit, the student as the main body, the school as the organizational unit, and the teacher as the guide. Research shows that effective parent-child activities can promote the emotional development of parent-child relationships, cultivate children's learning interests and abilities, and enhance children's social skills. A parent-child activity not only requires the school and teachers to be well-prepared, but parents should also be the collaborators of the activity, actively planning and coordinating specific parent-child activities. Parents are the ones who are closer to their children and know them better. Involving parents in the design of parent-child activities is more conducive to the development of each child's mental health. Parent-child activities constructed in this way will have more rich forms of activities and will achieve better results. The development of social and emotional competence of primary school children in the lower grades is based on this kind of social and family environment in which multiple parties rely on each other and work together.

## 4. The Role of Teachers in Parent-Child Activities

### 4.1. Observer

The design of parent-child activities requires teachers' wisdom and more importantly, their knowledge of students. Different students have different family backgrounds and different family situations. Teachers are the companions who spend the longest time with children in their daily school life, and they are also the ones who can more easily observe the emotional changes of students. In the process of parent-child activities, teachers should act as observers and communicate with their children's parents accordingly to observe the closeness of parent-child relationship in the activities and adjust the ways and means of treating different students in time. Teachers also bear the responsibility of easing the communication barriers between parents and children and should observe the conflicts between children and parents and give timely feedback on the problems.

### 4.2. Organizers

Teachers are the most direct intermediary between the school and parents, and the spokesperson for the school's philosophy. Each parent-child activity requires teachers to initiate the planning of the activity and contact parents by phone or message to organize it. At the end of the program, teachers are required to record the entire program and provide feedback. The design of parent-child activities should take into account the physical and mental growth and development of primary school students as well as their individual characteristics. Parents are not professionals in education, and their knowledge of education is not as comprehensive as that of teachers, so there are certain blind spots that require teachers to organize and design the activities according to the lack of social and emotional competence of primary school students in the lower grades.

## 5. Design of Parent-Child Activities

The content of parent-child activities can encompass a wide range of areas, including math, thinking, science, language, geography, biology, English, and so on. Therefore, the objectives and focus of the activities should be clearly defined before the design of parent-child activities. Before centering on a certain theme, make a list of relevant knowledge and choose one of the five social and emotional competencies as the main cultivation goal. After the activity, the effectiveness of the activity should be evaluated and reflected upon based on relevant questionnaires and tests (as shown in Table 1).

Table 1: Activity Design

Activity Theme	Nature's Treasure Hunt
Purpose of the event	1. Students are able to understand the rules of the game and find the corresponding plants in the school's botanical garden under the guidance of teachers and parents. Students will be able to discover, appreciate and create beauty, and cultivate the beautiful character of loving nature and protecting the environment.
Activity Objects	All students and their parents
Event Location	Campus

Table 1: (continued)

<p>Course of events</p>	<p>1. Warm-up introduction, health and happiness                  Teachers use the teaching method to organize rhythmic activities, singing children's songs while leading parents and students to do the movements. Consider that the cognitive characteristics of primary school students at the lower school level are that they are willing to imitate. Teachers should first do a good job of modeling.</p> <p>2. Issuing task cards to understand the content of the task                  a) The teacher explains the rules of the task to the students and parents along with movement demonstrations.                  b) Explanation: We have to find the things on the cards, and when we find them, like the teacher, use the pen to check the corresponding patterns on the cards, and put the things in the little flower basket the teacher has prepared for everyone. In this way, we have completed a small task.</p> <p>3. A fun treasure hunt to explore nature                  Teachers help parents with parent-child guidance and communication during the program. Parents help their children recognize the plants on the cards and observe the characteristics of the plants on the cards. Then teachers guide parents and children to collaborate to find the corresponding plants on the cards. Families who actively participate in the activity are promptly recognized and encouraged.</p> <p>4. Parent-child creativity and fun                  The teacher asks each family to choose a plant to draw and create. At the end of the process, the teacher collects each family's creations and creates an e-garden of the collection of creations to give back to the children and parents.</p>
<p>Summary of activities</p>	<p>In this activity, parents and children united for a common goal, while cultivating the children's ability to explore nature, so that they can learn and recognize new and strange things with an open attitude. From the cognitive tasks to the actual treasure hunt, to the free creation, the children were given great space to play, so that the children could completely release their imagination, and gain happiness and satisfaction.</p>
<p>Activity Reflection</p>	<p>The design of this activity follows the principle of being student-oriented, on the basis of the children's original cognitive foundation, to develop their hands-on collaborative ability, observation, and exploration ability. At the same time, it takes into account the parents and provides them with parenting help. Finally, outdoor activities should pay attention to the safety of children.</p>

## 6. Conclusion

The design of any parent-child activity requires parents and children to participate in it and reap the benefits of joy and happiness. At the same time, the design of parent-child activities for elementary school students should pay more attention to the cultivation of children's specific abilities on the basis of kindergarten parent-child activities. Nowadays, there are certain problems in the cultivation of the social-emotional ability of primary school students in China, and most of them have a weak social-emotional awareness. On the one hand, the transitional emphasis on academic performance while neglecting the development of the emotional intelligence of students, resulting in the development of social and emotional competence stops. Therefore, strengthening home-school co-education and promoting parent-child communication and interaction are the key points to promote the development of students' social and emotional competence. The home-school community should create a better

environment and atmosphere for the development of students' social and emotional competence, pay attention to the diversity of students, and give students more opportunities for development. Finally, it is hoped that more educational resources can make the design of parent-child activities more colorful.

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