

ECEY5010 – Research for learning

For this assignment I have submitted the following

Component 1 – A literature review

Component 2 – Methodological consideration

Component 3 – Ethical consideration

Word count – 4090

I have used AI to put my references in alphabetical order

Section 1 - A literature review

An exploration of the impact of emotional literacy support assistant (ELSA) interventions on children's emotional wellbeing in primary education.

An Emotional literacy support assistant (ELSA) works within educational settings to support the emotional wellbeing, social skills and mental health needs of children and young people. An ELSA is trained over course of five whole days with an Educational Psychologist. The training focuses on children's holistic development and emotional needs. A child's emotional wellbeing is viewed as integral to learning. The ELSA training focuses on psychological theory "The ELSA course focuses on supporting emotional needs of children in schools, looking at the holistic development of the child. Psychological theory is used to help provide practical support to help Teaching Assistants (TAs) meet the emotional needs of the children in a school setting." (Dodds and Blake, 2015)

Emotional wellbeing can significantly impact a child's ability to learn, build relationships, regulate emotions and engage positively within educational environments. In recent years schools have been expected to provide not only academic support but also emotional and pastoral support to meet the growing social and emotional needs of pupils, as a result intervention aimed at promoting emotional literacy and resilience have become more widely implemented within education setting. One role that has vital in response to these concerns is the Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA). ELSAs provide support through one-to-one sessions and small group interventions their aim is to support children in developing emotional awareness, self-esteem, coping strategies and positive relationships. The role is often carried out under the guidance of an Educational Psychologists and contributes towards creating inclusive and supportive learning environments.

ELSA interventions take place in a safe, relaxed, supportive and nurturing environment which is intended to help children feel comfortable and emotionally secure when discussing their feelings and experiences. Settings are encouraged to use available funding to develop a dedicated ELSA space, creating an environment

that feels welcoming and calming for the child. Staffordshire County Council Educational Psychology Service, 2022) report emphasises the importance of creating a suitable space, stating “Creating this nurturing environment is important for ELSA, offering juice and biscuits makes the young people feel special, warm and welcomed. It emphasises that it is a safe space and is different to their other more academic attainment focussed interventions” this highlights how the physical environment can contribute to establishing a sense of safety and trust which may support children in engaging openly in the intervention and then transferring those skills into other areas of their academic journey.

This literature review will explore the role and effectiveness of ELSAs within schools, alongside the wider importance of emotional wellbeing within education. It will examine current research relating to children's mental health, emotional literacy, early intervention and the impact emotional support can have on children's wellbeing, behaviour and learning outcomes. The review will also consider the challenges schools face in supporting increasing mental health needs and the significance of nurturing approaches within educational practice.

ELSA intervention involves delivering targeted interventions that help children develop emotional literacy, self-esteem, resilience and positive coping strategies. “As with all interventions, it is important that they are person centred, ELSA is no different. ELSA works best when it is attuned to the young person's targets, and they are able to tailor sessions to work best for them. In the interviews, young people shared how their sessions are organised and the kind of things they do. Some young people shared that they get to pick what kind of activities they do which gives them a sense of autonomy.” (Staffordshire County Council Educational Psychology Service, 2022). ELSAs often work under the supervision of educational psychologists and collaborate with teachers, parents and other professionals to create a safe and positive learning environment. An ELSA will often work one-to-one or in small groups offering behaviour support, friendship and social communication interventions as well as helping children to manage anxiety, bereavement or emotional regulation. The role requires ELSAs to build trusting relationships, maintaining confidentiality and adapting support to meet individual children's needs ensuring that children can overcome emotional barriers to learn and improve their engagement, behaviour and interpersonal skills.

Current literature research surrounding Emotional Literacy support assistants (ELSAs) suggests that emotional intervention programmes within schools is having a positive impact on children's wellbeing and education experiences. Research commonly highlights improvements in emotional regulation, confidence, communication skills and peer relationships following ELSA intervention. Studies also suggest that children that receive ELSA intervention support may demonstrate improved classroom behaviour, increased engagement in learning and greater ability to express and manage their emotions. These findings support the idea that early intervention can contribute towards creating more inclusive and nurturing environments for all children to feel safe.

Several studies emphasise the importance of trusting relationships within ELSA practice, suggesting that children benefit from having consistent emotional support from familiar adults within school settings “a nurturing relationship allows children to feel that unconditional positive regard. It allows young people to feel safe and wanted while they talk to their ELSA.” (Staffordshire County Council Educational Psychology Service, 2022) This highlights the importance of the practitioner developing a trusting relationship and non-judgmental relationship with the child, as feeling accepted and emotionally secure may encourage greater openness and engagement throughout the intervention.

Emotional literacy interventions have also been linked to reduced anxiety, improved self-esteem and stronger social interactions skills, particularly for children experiencing social, emotional and mental health difficulties. In response to this evidence base, many schools now implement a Wellbeing policy that recognises the importance of supporting and nurturing children's emotional development. The Glan Usk Wellbeing Policy aligns with wider educational policies that position emotional wellbeing as closely connected to academic achievement and overall child development.

The literature also highlights inconsistencies in how ELSA interventions are delivered across schools. Variations in training, resources, intervention length, funding allocated to wellbeing support can make it difficult to compare findings and the outcomes of ELSA intervention. Furthermore, while some studies report significant improvements in wellbeing and behaviour, others suggest that evidence remains

relatively small-scale and lacks rigorous evaluation methods. This raises questions regarding how effectiveness should be measured and whether positive outcomes are directly linked to ELSA interventions alone or influenced by wider school and family factors. Therefore, a critical discussion of the literature is necessary to move beyond simply describing positive outcomes. It is important to evaluate the strengths and limitations of existing research, consider the reliability of evidence presented and explore the challenges involved in measuring emotional wellbeing with educational settings.

This research is important due to the increasing concerns surrounding children and young people's mental health and emotional wellbeing. Reports and educational research continue to highlight rising levels of anxiety, emotional difficulties and behavioural challenges among children within school settings. As a result, schools are increasingly expected to provide both academic and emotional support to help children manage social and emotional difficulties that may affect learning, behaviour and relationships. "Being taught coping strategies was something a lot of the young people had in common, and this seemed to be a significant part of ELSA. They were able to practice them in the safety of their ELSA sessions and then transfer this new learning to the classroom, playground or at home." (Staffordshire County Council Educational Psychology Service, 2022) This demonstrates the value of ELSA supporting children to develop practical emotional coping strategies that can be applied beyond the intervention itself. The opportunity to practice these strategies within a safe and supportive ELSA environment may help children develop confidence in using them independently in other situations and settings. Therefore, researching the effectiveness of ELSA is important in determining whether these skills are successfully transferred into children's everyday experiences and contribute to improvements in their own emotional wellbeing.

With the growing pressure placed on schools to support children's mental health, this has led to the development of interventions such as ELSA. Early intervention is recognised as an important approach in supporting children before emotional difficulties escalate further. By identifying and addressing the emotional needs at an early stage, schools may be able to improve children's resilience, emotional regulation and engagement. Therefore, understanding if ELSA intervention is

effective is significant for both educational practice and for the children's overall wellbeing.

The importance of emotional support within schools can also be linked to several developmental theories. Lev Vygotsky's "introduced the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which refers to the difference between what a child can do independently and what a child can achieve with guidance and support. (The Voice of Early Childhood, n.d.). The Zone of Proximal Development provides a useful theoretical framework for understanding the role of an ELSA, as it highlights how supportive adult guidance can enable children to develop skills that they may not yet be able to achieve independently. This process is also referred to as scaffolding where support is gradually reduced as the child develops greater confidence and understanding. Within an ELSA intervention, the practitioner can act as a form of scaffolding by providing appropriate emotional support, guidance and encouragement, gradually enabling the child to develop greater emotional understanding and independence. As those skills are developing the level of support can gradually be reduced.

Similarly, John Bowlby's attachment theory highlights the importance of emotional security and consistent relationships in supporting wellbeing and development. "A Crucial element of an ELSA is being empathetic and warm. It is important that adults who are trained as ELSAs have a caring and kind personality, they must be someone who is able to relate to the young people and inspire them." (Staffordshire County Council Educational Psychology Service, 2022) These qualities may help the practitioner to establish a trusting and secure relationship with the child, reflecting Bowlby's view that responsive and emotionally available adults can provide children with a secure base from which they can explore and develop. Therefore, the relationship between the ELSA practitioner and child may be an important factor in enabling children to feel emotionally safe and engaged meaningfully with the intervention. It is also particularly important within the ELSA role as the practitioner provides a safe, supportive and consistent relationship which the child feel able to express their emotions and develop strategies for managing them. Through this support relationships, ELSA interventions may help to promote children's emotional security and resilience, particularly for those who may experience difficulties forming and maintaining relationships.

In addition to Vygotski and Bowlby, Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs suggests that children's emotional and psychological wellbeing must be supported before effective learning can take place. This reinforces the idea that emotional wellbeing should be prioritised within educational settings, as unmet emotional needs may act as a barrier to learning and participation. In relation to ELSA provision this theory highlights the importance of creating a supportive environment where children's emotional needs are recognised and addressed, enabling them to develop the confidence, security and self-esteem required to engage more effectively with learning. Vygotsky, Bowlby and Maslow all provide a different perspective that supports the importance of ELSA interventions, suggesting that addressing children's emotional needs may contribute to their wider development and learning. Therefore, examining the impact of ELSA interventions within primary education is important in understanding whether this theoretical rationale is reflected in children's emotional wellbeing in practice.

Section 2 - Methodological consideration

The proposed research would focus on primary school children who are currently receiving ELSA intervention alongside staff and class teachers working closely with those children. These participants have been chosen because they have direct experience and understanding of the impact of ELSA support within the school environment.

The inclusion of different participant groups may provide a broader and more balanced understanding of the effectiveness of ELSA intervention. Children receiving ELSA support may provide first hand insight to their experiences of emotional wellbeing support and how the intervention has impacted their confidence, emotional regulation and relationships within school. However younger children may find it difficult to verbally express emotions other than fully articulate their experiences which could affect their depth of reliability of responses.

ELSAs may provide valuable professional perspectives regarding the aims of interventions, the strategies used to support children and the progress observed over time. As ELSAs work directly with children in emotional support sessions, they may offer detailed insight into how emotional literacy interventions are implemented within schools. However, there is a possibility of bias as ELSA may view the intervention passively due to the direct involvement in delivering the support.

Teachers may also provide important information regarding changes in classroom behaviour, social interaction, emotional regulation and engagement within learning following ELSA interventions. As teachers observe children within the wider classroom environment, they may identify changes that are not visible within intervention sessions alone. However, teacher perceptions may also be influenced by classroom pressures, personal expectations or limited time spent observing individual emotional development. By including multiple participant groups, it may strengthen research through gaining a range of perspectives, allowing findings to be compared rather than relying on a single viewpoint.

A semi structured interview was chosen as they allow participants to provide detailed responses while still enabling researcher to guide the discussion around the researcher aims. Semi structured interviews are well suited to exploring emotional wellbeing, which is a personal and subjective experience. Unlike quantitative methods that focus on numerical data interviews, semi-structured interviews allow participants to describe their thoughts, feelings and experiences in their own words, providing richer and more detailed data. This is particularly important when researching the impact of ELSA interventions, as changes in confidence, emotional regulation and wellbeing may be experienced differently by each child.

A recent report by Staffordshire County Council Educational Psychology service used a semi-structured questionnaire approach to evaluate the impact of ELSA provision across schools. The data was gathered from Headteachers ALNCo's and it demonstrates the positive impact that ELSA's are having on children over all wellbeing. "The results from the questionnaires revealed that 100% of Headteachers/ SENCos said they strongly agreed that the work done by their school ELSA is highly valued. Additionally, 88.89% of headteachers/ SENCos said they strongly agreed they would recommend ELSA to a colleague." (Staffordshire County Council Educational Psychology Service, 2022) this suggests a high level of professional confidence in the effectiveness and value of ELSA support within educational settings.

Data protection during this research will be handled in accordance with ethical principles and relevant data protection legislation, including the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. Data will be collected through appropriate research methods such as interviews with participants

and only information relevant to the research aims will be collected. Participants will be informed about how their data will be used, stored and protected and consent will be obtained before data collection takes place.

To maintain confidentiality and protect participant privacy, participants will not be identified by their real names within the research findings. Any identifying information that could reveal the identity of a child, staff member or school will be removed where appropriate. This is particularly important when researching children's emotional wellbeing, as the information shared may be personal or sensitive.

By the researcher collecting data through semi structured interviews it allows flexibility and consistency through prepared a set of guiding questions, follow up questions can then be used to explore emerging themes and gain greater depth of understanding of the participants perspective, perceived benefits, challenged and the overall impact ELSA intervention has had on the individual and help researchers explore areas that may not have been considered initially. Semi-structured interviews with ELSA staff will provide an insight into the delivery of interventions, the approaches used, and their perceptions of the impact on children's emotional literacy and wellbeing. While the class teacher views will help explore how ELSA support is observed within the classroom whether changes in children's emotional, social, or behavioural needed are noticed.

By the researcher including the children's perspectives it will allow the child to express their own experiences and feelings about ELSA intervention. "Being taught coping strategies was something a lot of the young people had in common, and this seemed to be a significant part of ELSA. They were able to practice them in the safety of their ELSA sessions and then transfer this new learning to the classroom, playground or at home. (Staffordshire County Council Educational Psychology Service, 2022) While these findings offer a useful insight into pupils' experiences they are shaped by semi-structured interviews approach, which carries certain limitations that should be acknowledged.

Semi structured interviews are not without their limitations. Responses can be influenced by social desirability bias, where participants may provide answers, they believe are expected by the researcher rather than their genuine views. In addition, interviewing children about emotional experiences may be challenging, as some may find it difficult to communicate their feelings or may feel uncomfortable discussing sensitive subjects.

The Hawthorn effect should also consider when looking at the data collected, as participants may alter their behaviour when they are aware they are being observed to studied. This could influence the reliability of research into ELSA interventions, as a child or staff may behave differently during the research process. This is when triangulation can help to strengthen the credibility of findings by gathering data from multiple perspectives and methods, such as observations, interviews and staff feedback. Comparing these sources may help to identify whether findings are consistent and reduce risks of conclusions being based on behaviour influenced by the research process.

Despite these limitations interviews are considered an appropriate method for this study because they offer a detailed insight into participants experiences and perceptions of the effectiveness of ELSA intervention from a range of people involved.

To strengthen the credibility of the research finding, triangulation would be considered through gathering data from multiple perspectives. This would involve interviewing the children receiving ELSA support, the ELSA staff and the class teachers who work closely with those children. By using different participant groups, it allows researchers to compare experiences and identify similarities or differences in perceptions of the impact of ELSA interventions. For example, children may provide insight into their personal experiences of emotional support, while ELSAs and teachers may provide observation of changes in emotional regulation, behaviour, confidence and relationships. Using triangulation is beneficial as it reduces reliance on a single viewpoint and provides a more balanced understanding of the research topic. However, differences between participants experiences may occur as each group will view ELSA intervention from a different perspective. Meaning that the findings will need to be carefully analysed to consider the context and individual experiences of the participants. This approach can help to identify whether reported changed are consistent across different perspectives, strengthening the overall credibility of the research findings while recognising that individual experiences may vary.

Section 3 - Ethical consideration

Ethical considerations is an important aspect of research involving children and emotional wellbeing particularly within the context of ELSA support/ intervention. Ethics refers to the values, morals, principles and professional responsibilities that guide decision making and ensure research is conducted in a respectful, safe and fair way. Ethical considerations are especially significant when working with children, as participants may be vulnerable and discussing personal experiences relating to emotions and wellbeing. The importance of ethical consideration in research can be demonstrated by historical studies where ethical standards were not appropriately followed. One example is the Little Albert Experiment, where researchers John B. Watson and Rosalie Rayner in 1920 investigated whether emotional responses like fear could be learned through conditioning. Little Albert was an infant who was initially not afraid of. The researchers repeatedly presented the rat alongside a loud, frightening noise. Eventually Albert began to display fear when presented with the rat alone.

The study has been criticised due to the lack of consent, limited protection of the child from psychological harm and concerns about whether the child's wellbeing was prioritised. Today the research would not be considered ethically acceptable because it deliberately caused distress and fear in a young child.

Research like the Little Albert Experiment highlights the potential risks of research involving children when ethical principles are not carefully considered. When researching and exploring the impact of ELSA, ethical practice was particularly important ensuring that all children involved in the research provided informed assent, alongside parental consent and that they understood their right to withdraw at any stage. It is important that children are not pressured into taking part and understand that their decision will be respected. Participants would also have the right to withdraw from the research at any stage without needed to provide a reason. This supported in legislation, which states " The data subject shall have the right to withdraw his or her consent at any time. The withdrawal of consent shall not affect the lawfulness of processing based on consent before its withdrawal. Prior to giving consent, the data subject shall be informed thereof. It shall be as easy to withdraw

as to give consent.” (European Parliament and Council, 2018 Article 7(3)) This helps to protect participants autonomy and ensures involvement remains voluntary. Due to the sensitive nature of discussing emotional wellbeing, participants should also be informed about how their information will be used, stored and reported. Openness and disclosure are important so that participants understand the purpose of the research and what their involvement will involve.

Confidentiality and safeguarding are key considerations within ELSA intervention. The ELSA programme emphasises the importance of establishing an agreement with the child at the beginning of the intervention “It is really important when working with a child that you follow all safeguarding procedures and one of those is discussing confidentiality.’ (ELSA Support, n.d), explaining that although the discussions will be treated respectfully and confidentially, information may need to be shared with an appropriate adult if there are concerns about their safety or wellbeing. Children should understand from the outset that ELSA practitioners have a responsibility to pass on information if they believe the child or another person may be at risk of harm. Like the interventions confidentiality and safeguarding are also importance considerations when conducting the semi- structured interviews as part of the research project. Participants would be informed that any information they share during interviews would be treated sensitively and kept confidential, with their identities protected using anonymous data. Maintaining confidentiality is important as it helps participants feel safe and encourages honest discussion about their experiences of ELSA support and emotional wellbeing.

However, confidentiality has limits, particularly when researching children. If a participant disclosed information suggesting that they, or another child, may be at risk of harm, the researcher has a professional responsibility to share information with the appropriate safeguarding lead in line with the school’s safeguarding policies and child protection procedures. This ensures that the child’s safety remains the priority, even where confidentiality cannot be fully maintained.

This consideration is particularly relevant withing ELSA research, as ELSAs work with children who may experience emotional, social and behavioural difficulties, meaning that discussions could involves sensitive topics such as worries, relationships or personal challenges. Therefore, the research would need to be clear in the safeguarding procedures in place within the setting. This demonstrates an

ethical approach to research by balancing the child's rights to privacy with the researcher's responsibility to safeguard children from harm and protect their wellbeing.

Overall, ethical practice is essential to ensure that research into ELSA intervention respects children's rights, protects their wellbeing and maintains professional standards. The priority of any research involving children should always be to safeguard them protect their dignity and individual rights by ensuring their participation is voluntary, informed and carried out in a supportive and respectful manner.

References

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