

Benefits of an Out-of-School Time Program on Social-Emotional Learning
among Underprivileged Adolescent Youth: A Retrospective Analysis

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Abstract

Although it is assumed out-of-school time (OST) programs can have long term positive outcomes on the social-emotional learning (SEL) of youth, few studies have explored their benefits in a retrospective analysis. Based on retrospective accounts of 194 alumni (age 15-30 years), the present study assessed the self-perceived benefits on different dimensions of social-emotional learning (SEL) as a result of the three years Weekendschool program for students between 10-14 years in the Netherlands. Alumni look back positively on the benefits after having completed the program. The results of linear mixed models showed that alumni reported higher levels of self-management, self-awareness and future perspective when living in an urban area compared to those who part in provincial areas. Students from preparatory vocational high school experienced more results compared to alumni from other school types. When alumni took part in a national follow-up program, they were more positive on all SEL dimensions.

Keywords:

out-of-school-time programs (OST); social-emotional learning (SEL); youth development; retrospective study; urban education; at-risk students, underprivileged neighborhoods, 10-14 age group

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1 Introduction

Children growing up in economically disadvantaged backgrounds generally do not experience the same benefits as do children from middle-class backgrounds, with parents not always being able to support their children academically or because they are unable to facilitate the kind of cultural enrichment known to enhance academic, social and personal development (Anthony, Alter, & Jenson, 2009; Hall, Williams, & Daniel, 2010). Hence, underprivileged youth can particularly benefit from out-of-school time programs (Lauer et al., 2006; Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). Youth from underprivileged backgrounds have a higher chance of facing stressors within their homes, their communities and their schools (Frazier et al., 2015), and may lack positive role models to increase their self-esteem, social skills and future perspectives (Braster & Bronkers, 2013) and to role model upward mobility (Grant et al., 2003). Also, children from underprivileged backgrounds more often face hostility and stigmatization at school, with teachers having lower expectations even when their test-scores are similar to their peers from middle-class backgrounds (Braster & Bronkers, 2013). The communities of underprivileged youth may not offer a diverse social network where adults have been able to role model upward mobility (Grant et al., 2003).

The challenge to tackle the adverse conditions for positive youth development is particularly predominant in the urban context. It is in urban settings that youth from underprivileged backgrounds are overrepresented and where youth face an accumulated amount of risk factors (Bulanda & McCrea, 2013). Big cities have higher concentrations of

poverty. In many Western countries such as the United States, Germany, Great Britain and the Netherlands, children from big cities have lower academic achievements than their provincial peers (OECD, 2015). It is therefore especially important to facilitate urban youth from disadvantaged backgrounds with a supportive and enriching environment (Schwartz, Cappella, & Seidman, 2015), and OST programs can be one such environment where young adolescents can build positive relationships with other significant adults and peers and where they can be empowered to develop social and emotional learning.

1.1 Out-of-School Programs

Many out-of-school (OST) programs, defined as educational programs occurring out of school time, aim to provide underprivileged, urban youth with safe and empowering learning environments to enhance academic success and personal development. OST programs can facilitate an environment where underprivileged youth experience the motivational support and meet positive role models where they can experience enrichment, all leading to enhanced self-esteem, social skills and future perspectives (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan., 2010).

Research has shown the importance of enhancing social and emotional skills to increase children's chances of success in their school and in their careers and lives. OST programs are known to positively enhance youth development, both academically as well as socially and emotionally (Durlak et al., 2010; Lauer, Akiba, Wilkerson, Apthorp, Billings, & Martin-Glenn, 2006; Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg, 2017). OST programs focusing on academic support for underprivileged youth have shown positive effects on academic achievement, including reading and mathematics (Lauer et al., 2006), particularly for elementary school children. Participants of OST programs show an increased positive self-perception, positive social behaviors, bonding to school, school grades and levels of academic achievement as well as a reduction in risky behavior, depression and delinquency (Durlak et al., 2010).

1.2 Frameworks for the Development of Social-emotional Skills

The interest in OST programs and their impact on adolescents' socio-emotional development fit in with a shift that has been made from the deficit and risk-oriented frameworks for battling problematic social-emotional behavior to the attempt of defining positive social-emotional development and the essential skills necessary with the focus on preventative interventions. Different conceptual frameworks have been developed to foster children's social-emotional wellbeing and the adaptation and ability over limitations and deficits, including Social Competence (SC), Positive Youth Development (PYD) and Positive Psychology (PP) and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). These frameworks share many similarities and Tolan, Ross, Arkin, Godine and Clark (2016) identified four overarching constructs as the common thread in all four frameworks, namely Self-control, Positive self-orientation, Engagement with others and Societal bonding/Moral ethical standards.

Regarding school and afterschool programs, SEL has been the most widely used framework for developing these skills. The SEL framework is defined by CASEL (www.casel.org) as "the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2015: 5). Five core competencies are distinguished in the framework: (a) self-awareness, defined as the ability to recognize one's emotions and assess one's strengths and weaknesses; (b) self-management, defined as the ability to regulate thoughts, emotions and behaviors; (c) social awareness, defined as the awareness of the culture, beliefs and feelings of the people and world around oneself; (d) relationship skills, defined as the ability to communicate effectively and work with peers as well as build meaningful relationship; and (e) responsible decision making, defined as the ability to make plans for the future while following moral and ethical standards that also contribute to the wellbeing of

others. Extending the SEL framework, Elias (1997) added two constructs in his New Haven Framework: Attitudes and values about Tasks, defined as the willingness to work hard, the motivation to solve practical and academic problems, the recognition of education and respect for property, as well as (g) Content, regarding the promotion of knowledge in regards to health, relationships and school and community.

School-based SEL programs enhance the socio-emotional development (Durlak et al., 2011), showing effects across all school levels regardless of race and background. The recent meta-analysis of follow-up effects of Taylor et al. (2017) showed that participants of SEL programs have a higher level of wellbeing between 6 months and eighteen years after termination of the SEL intervention. However, this research focuses solely on school-based interventions and research regarding the specific effects of SEL when partaking in OST programs targeted at underprivileged youth is still limited. Future research should increase our understanding of the impact of OST programs on the socio-emotional development in the long run. This study aims to deepen our understanding of the perceived benefits of youth looking back retrospectively over their participation in a three-year weekendschool program six months to fifteen years postintervention. This provides a unique insight into the long-term benefits from the perspective of youth themselves.

1.3 OST in the Netherlands: IMC Weekendschool

The IMC Weekendschool is a Dutch, three-year enrichment program focusing on young adolescents from 10-14 years of age from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Weekendschool started in 1998 and offers the three-year program on nine different locations spread out through the Netherlands. Thirty Sundays a year, students participate in a program with interactive guest lectures, focusing on the development of social and emotional skills (SEL) and talent development. The guest lectures are given by different professionals in the work field ranging from lawyers to graphic designers, journalists and musicians. Every group

has one coordinating mentor whom is always present and prepares, participates and evaluates the Sunday program with the adolescents participating. After the three-year program students are invited to participate in alumni programs.

The program characteristics of the Weekendschool are according to those found to be effective in the meta-analysis by Durlak et al. (2010). The Weekendschool adheres to the SAFE criteria, with its three-year program in which adolescents actively participate in a sequenced, focused, active and explicit program. With the Weekendschool's three year program in which adolescents actively participate in the classes and also have regular outings, it can be concluded that this OST program is promising in its objectives to enhance the lives of young adolescents from disadvantaged backgrounds by developing their future perspectives and their social-emotional skills.

1.4 Current Study

Although research into the effects of OST programs on the socio-emotional development of adolescents has increased the last decade, less is known about the perceived benefits and personal experiences on the long term. To our knowledge, there is no retrospective study into the perceived benefits of OST programs for underprivileged youth. The present study evaluated how alumni look back on the long-term benefits of participating in a Dutch, three-year weekend enrichment program ranging from one to fifteen years post completion. This study investigated two questions. First, what is the general evaluation of Weekendschool alumni regarding the perceived benefits of their social-emotional skills after completing the program? Secondly, which characteristics of alumni moderate the perceptions of social-emotional skills?

2 Method

2.1 Sample

The sample included 194 Weekendschool alumni. These alumni members all graduated from the three-year program and participated between 1998 and 2015. The ages of the alumni at the time of the data collection ranged from 14-29 years old ($M=18$, $SD = 3.28$). A higher proportion of the respondents is female, 61%. The alumni members had all participated in one of the ten Weekendschool locations in the Netherlands; of which 67% of the participants went to a program in one of the four largest cities (G4), 7% participated in The Hague, 8% participated in Utrecht and 11% participated in one of the two locations Rotterdam, and the majority of the respondents (41%) went to Weekendschools in one of the three locations in Amsterdam, which are the oldest of the ten locations. The remaining 33% went to one of the other three non-urban locations, in Tilburg, Nijmegen and Groningen. Of all the respondents, 42% went to preparatory vocational high school, 28% went to higher vocational high school and 19% went to academic high school. Nationally the averages for the different levels of high school between 2005-2006 were 58.7% preparatory vocational high school and 23.8% higher vocational high school and 17.5% academic high school (Central Bureau for Statistics, CBS, 2020).

2.2 Procedure

Recruitment for this study involved sending e-mails to members who are alumni of the Weekendschool. Two months prior to the data-collection staff from the IMC Weekendschool worked to retrieve up-to-date contact information of all its members. The Weekendschool was in the possession of 968 active e-mail addresses of its then (2016) 1823 members (53%). Members received an email and when interested were directed to a website to fill out the survey on the Qualtrics platform. Before the alumni participants filled out the survey it had been piloted by a panel and after minor adjustments it was distributed amongst the interested participants. When alumni had not filled out the survey within a week after receiving the link,

a reminder was sent with a maximum of three repetitions. The Weekendschool also actively recruited alumni personally by contacting alumni members, using the telephone, Facebook messaging and WhatsApp-messaging. The survey took approximately 25 minutes to complete and it did not have to be completed in one session. After completing the survey participants received an e-mail with confirmation, thanking them for their participation.

2.3 Measures

To date there is no report of a validated SEL instrument measuring all five SEL competences for young adolescents in OST-programs, although various instruments have been used to measure SEL outcomes in studies with heterogeneous interventions and a diversity of target groups (Coryn, Spybrook, Evergreen, & Blinkiewicz, 2009; Ross & Tolan, 2018). Borrowing from the CASEL model and the extension from Elias' (1997) New Haven Framework, a new instrument was developed by De Groot, Terwijn, Van Driel and Vorst (2016) to measure social-emotional learning for alumni of Weekendschools with the following SEL subscales:

Self-Management Skills (SM). This subscale focuses on the perceived ability to regulate thoughts, emotions and behaviors (i.e. *"I learnt to actively participate during lessons at primary school"*, *"I learnt to make a plan when I want to reach a goal"*). The scale, which includes 10 items, had a good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$).

Responsible Decision Making (RD). This subscale (10 items, $\alpha = .91$) measures the perceived ability to make plans for the future while following moral and ethical standards that also contribute to the wellbeing of others (i.e. *"I learnt to look for alternative solutions when faced with problems"*, *"When deciding what to study I thoroughly check the options at hand"*).

Relationship Skills (RS). This subscale (10 items, $\alpha = .93$) aims to measure the ability to communicate effectively and work with peers as well as build meaningful relationship (i.e.

“I learnt to collaborate effectively with others”, “I learnt to form and express my own opinion”).

Self-Awareness (SA). The items from this subscale (10 items, $\alpha = .92$) are related to the ability to recognize one’s emotions and assess one’s strengths and weaknesses (i.e. *“I learnt to be myself”, “I learnt to choose a field of study that is closely linked to my talents”*).

Social awareness (SO). This subscale (10 items, $\alpha = .90$) measures the awareness of the culture, beliefs and feelings of people and community around oneself (i.e. *“I learnt to respect others”, “I realized the importance of contributing to society”*).

Attitude about Task (AT). This subscale (10 items, $\alpha = .89$) is focused on the willingness to work hard, the motivation to solve practical and academic problems (i.e., *“I learnt it’s okay to make mistakes” “I learnt to value education”*).

Long-term Results Weekendschool (RE), 7 items, $\alpha = .88$). This subscale aims to measure experienced long-term benefits of the out-of-school program (i.e., *“I learnt to apply my talents during high school”, “The weekendschool contributed to me choosing the right field of study”*).

Future Perspective (FP). The items from this subscale (FP, 7 items, $\alpha = .87$) are specifically related to how alumni view the benefits of the Weekendschool in regards to their future perspective (i.e., *“I am more aware now of my future opportunities”, “I learnt how a strong social network can help me in the future”*). Items from each of the above-mentioned subscales (SM through RE) were selected if they were specifically related to this dimension.

A 5-point Likert scale was used for all constructs, ranging from 1. not at all applicable, 2. somewhat applicable, 3. applicable, 4. very applicable, and 5. completely applicable. All items contained the starting phrase ‘Because of the Weekendschool...’ (or a similar phrase) as a recurring element to clarify for the participants that the items referred to their specific Weekendschool experiences (i.e., not life experiences in general or primary

school). The subscales were significantly related, as expected, with ‘explained’ variances (r^2) ranging from 38 to 82 percent.

Control items. A newly developed subscale was added with control items. The content of the items was related to the SEL framework and the Weekendschool program but items were all negatively worded (i.e. “*It’s unimportant to me to explore my interests*”, “*I am not capable of influencing my future to my benefit*”). This scale (10 items, $\alpha = .85$) was added to explore the discriminant validity of the SEL subscales. A preliminary analysis showed, as expected, very low and mostly non-significant correlations between the Control subscale and the SEL subscales, supporting their validity ($r = -.001, p = .986$), RD ($r = .034, p = .643$), RS ($r = -.173, p = .016$), SA ($r = .009, p = .904$), SO ($r = -.008, p = .911$), AT ($r = .005, p = .942$), RE ($r = -.173, p = .016$) and FP ($r = .043, p = .554$).

Background characteristics. Several questions from the survey were related to demographic, educational and program-related characteristics of the respondent, including age (see ref), gender (see ref), and level of secondary education. We also categorized the different Weekendschool locations as urban (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, the Hague and Utrecht) or non-urban (Tilburg, Nijmegen and Groningen) (see Bulanda & McCrea, 2013). The selection of these variables allowed a test of possible differences in the SEL outcome measures, based on the literature. We explored also whether participation in the national alumni program was related to the outcomes.

2.4 Analysis

Considering the hierarchical data with alumni (level 1) nested in locations of the Weekendschool program (level 2), we analyzed the outcome measures with a linear mixed model using SPSS with maximum likelihood estimation (see Table 2). We explored for each SEL measure whether outcomes were moderated by participants’ age, gender, level of secondary education, participation in the national alumni program and urban/non-urban

location. The fit of each model was evaluated by comparing the fit of the final model with the five predictors compared to a baseline model without predictors, indicated by the Akaike Information Criterion ($AIC_{\text{full model}} - AIC_{\text{baseline model}} = \Delta AIC$). The significance of the different predictors was determined at $p < .01$, taking into account the number of predictors from each model. The explanatory power of the models is indicated as the ‘explained’ variance, based on the squared correlation between observed and predicted scores (indicated with R^2).

3 Results

Alumni were generally positive, in retrospect, about their Weekendschool experiences about their self-reported SEL competences (see Table 1).

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Table 1

Descriptives for SEL outcome measures ($N = 194$)

	<i>Min-max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Self-management skills	1-5	3.57	0.82
Responsible decision-making skills	1-5	3.66	0.82
Relationship skills	1-5	3.64	0.86
Self-awareness	1-5	3.48	0.86
Social awareness	1-5	3.43	0.82
Attitude about task	1-5	3.63	0.78
Results	1-5	3.52	0.81
Future perspective	1-5	3.62	0.59

3.1 Moderators of SEL outcomes

Our moderator analyses revealed significant relationships between some of the characteristics of the Weekendschool alumni and their self-reports. First, membership of the national alumni program was related to more positive outcomes for all SEL measures. Second, urban participants had generally more favorable self-reports and these differences with non-urban peers were statistically significant for Self-Management skills, Self-awareness and Future Perspective. Finally, participation in secondary preparatory vocational high school education were more positive about Results, in comparison with participation in higher vocational or academic high school.

Gender was not related to differences in outcomes, indicating that boys and girls show no significant differences in their self-perceived benefits of the Weekendschool. We also analyzed a possible effect of participants' age because the difference was large in our sample

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with alumni who were 15 through 30 years old. Although alumni reported slightly lower scores with increasing age, no significant fading out pattern was observed (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

SEL outcomes in retrospective for alumni 1-5 yrs ($N = 123$); 6-10 yrs ($N = 61$) and 11-15 yrs ($N = 10$)

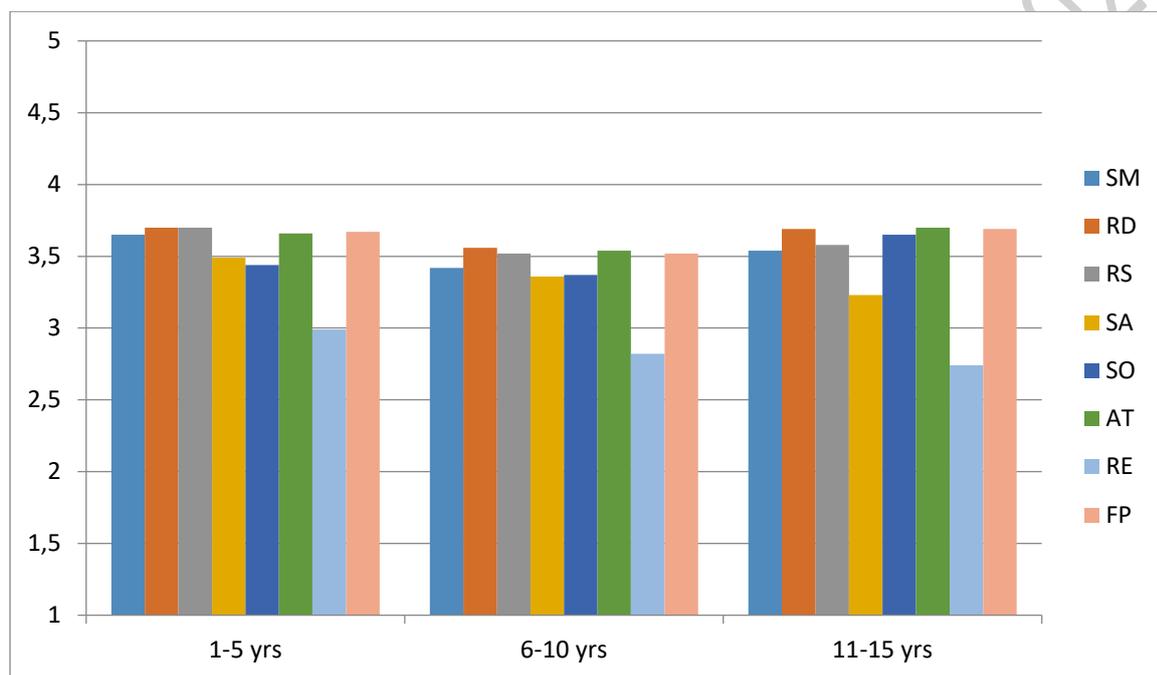


Table 2

Outcomes of Linear Mixed Models for the Different SEL measures

	SM	RD	RS	SA	SO	AT	RE	FP
Fixed effects								
Intercept	42.27** (3.28)	40.75** (3.36)	41.98** (3.53)	38.94** (3.45)	38.28** (3.37)	39.49** (3.27)	27.54** (2.86)	27.82** (2.44)
Gender (male)	-0.02 (1.14)	-0.15 (1.17)	0.01 (1.23)	0.51 (1.20)	0.46 (1.17)	-0.65 (1.14)	-0.23 (0.94)	-0.29 (0.85)
Age (yrs)	-0.26 (0.20)	-0.15 (0.20)	-0.26 (0.21)	-0.12 (0.21)	0.01 (0.20)	-0.06 (0.20)	-0.28 (1.07)	-0.07 (0.15)

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Preparatory	1.79 (1.12)	1.70 (1.15)	0.94 (1.20)	1.36 (1.18)	1.60 (1.15)	1.71 (1.12)	2.77** (0.91)	0.82 (0.83)
Alumni Program	5.69** (1.30)	5.10** (1.33)	5.62** (1.40)	5.99** (1.37)	5.70** (1.34)	3.43** (1.30)	2.27** (1.07)	2.54** (0.97)
Urban	3.71** (1.36)	2.85 (1.39)	2.87 (1.47)	5.35** (1.43)	3.14 (1.40)	3.01 (1.36)	2.88 (1.27)	2.10** (1.01)
Random effects								
Student residual	58.10** (5.93)	60.89** (6.21)	67.27** (6.87)	64.30** (6.56)	61.26** (6.25)	57.74** (5.89)	37.02** (1.36)	32.14** (3.28)
Student residual baseline	65.55** (6.78)	66.56** (6.76)	73.13** (7.58)	70.39** (7.04)	64.86** (6.73)	61.12** (6.29)	41.88** (4.36)	32.76** (3.24)
Model fit								
R^2	11.5	8.5	8.0	8.7	5.6	5.5	11.6	1.9
-2LL full model ($df=8$)	1324.81	1333.80	1352.93	1344.28	1334.99	1323.61	1236.97	1211.13
-2LL baseline ($df=3$)	1364.60	1364.98	1385.42	1480.60	1365.88	1362.59	1273.57	1290.70
Δ -2LL ($\Delta df=5$)	39.79**	31.18**	32.49**	136.32**	30.89**	38.98**	36.60**	79.57**
AIC full model	1340.81	1349.80	1368.93	1360.28	1350.99	1339.61	1252.97	1227.13
AIC baseline	1370.60	1370.98	1391.42	1486.60	1371.88	1368.59	1279.57	1296.70
Δ AIC	29.79**	21.18**	22.49**	126.32**	20.89**	28.98**	26.60**	69.57**

Note: SM= Self-management; RD= Responsible Decision-making; RS= Relationship skills; SA= Self-awareness; SO= Social awareness; AT= Attitude about Task; RE= Results; FP= Future Perspective; * = $p < .01$; ** = $p < .001$

Table 2 shows increased model fit for each SEL measure. Compared to the baseline intercept-only models, adding the predictors improved fit with a statistically significant decrease of the log-likelihood measure (-2LL) and Akaike Information Criterion (AIC). The explanatory power of the models was medium for Self-Management, Responsible Decision Making, Relationship Skills, Self-awareness, and Results, ‘explaining’ about 10 percent of the

variance in SEL measures. Predictive power was more modest for the other SEL measures Social Awareness, Attitude about Task and Future Perspective.

4 Conclusion and Discussion

The results of this study are, to our knowledge, among the first to voice the perceptions of alumni reporting on self-perceived out-of-school program benefits from a long-term perspective. Alumni respondents, from one to fifteen years after completion of the Weekendschool program, are largely positive about their Weekendschool experiences. This large and robust relationship within our study was found across all SEL dimensions for taking part in the weekendschool program. As there are no other long-term research results published on weekendschool results or other OST programs, our findings are a valuable addition to research published on long-term follow-up effects of school based SEL interventions, showing significant effects on social-emotional skills, attitudes and well-being, ranging from kindergarten to high school students (Taylor, Durlak, Oberle & Weissberg, 2017). Our results showed relatively high levels of SEL skills and these findings are promising as research has shown a strong association between SEL skills and wellbeing on long-term follow-up effects (Taylor et al., 2017).

Furthermore, our study also reveals significant moderators of the experienced benefits of the program. Results showed that participation in secondary preparatory vocational high school education was positively related to Results, indicating that alumni who participated in the most practical level of high school experienced an increased effort into putting their talents to use at high school as a result of their Weekendschool participation and completion. They indicated to actively invest into their personal interests after school, more so than their peers participating in the more academic levels of high school. Further, urban students

reported favorable results for different socio-emotional learning domains (i.e., self-management, self-awareness, future perspective). The urban and participatory vocational training moderators highlight the potential of out-of-school programs for underprivileged youth who have lower academic achievements and who grow up in disadvantaged urban areas. Our study strongly suggests that these students-at-risk profit from the Weekendschool program and experience a higher level of socio-emotional learning. This finding is interesting in the Dutch context, because in the Netherlands the Education Inspectorate's annual report on the state of education showed an increase in inequality regarding academic achievement for children with low SES (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2018). The founding of OST programs has been increasing to bridge the gap and create enriching learning environments for underprivileged children with the objective to increase their opportunities of both academic success and their future perspectives. Although previous research into the follow-up effects of school based SEL interventions shows no moderation effects between groups, it is known that most interventions do target specific groups (Taylor et.al, 2017). It is this targeting that makes interventions tailored to the needs of certain groups or individuals. The findings of our study suggest it is important to consider the possible different needs of groups and individuals, whether it is based on their academic levels or their location, and to develop a curriculum based on their needs.

Lastly, our study shows significant moderation for active participation in follow-up alumni programs. This finding suggests that to maintain positive outcomes, post-intervention follow-up activities can contribute to maintaining long-term effects of an afterschool program for underprivileged youth.

Finally, we did not observe a significant fade out effect in our study and perceptions were equally positive for our sample, which included young adolescents who recently completed the Weekendschool program and adults who have finished it many years ago. No

significant gender difference have been found earlier meta-analysis of experimental studies regarding outcomes of out-of-school time programs (Durlak, Weisberg, & Pachan, 2010). Our retrospective study extends this finding and suggests that boys and girls are also similar when they look back on their out-of-school program experiences.

Our moderators at individual level complement the findings from experimental research. Previous experimental research has revealed different moderators at program level for SEL development, like children signing up and participating in an intake session to discuss students' motivation (Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer, 2003), a recreational design (Lauer et al., 2006) with a clear curriculum based on the SAFE principles (sequenced, active, focused and explicit) and a clear structure provided by adults (Durlak et al, 2010). Furthermore, research has shown positive relations between the duration and intensity of participation in organized afterschool activities and educational, civic and occupational success (Gardner, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008).

4.1 Limitations and Future Research

Our study has several important limitations. First, the participants in this sample may very well only represent participants who look back positively on program participation, as it is known that participants of programs who look back negatively don't respond as often to sampling requests (Maruyama & Ryan, 2014). Second, our study involves self-reported perceptions of SEL measures, which were evaluated with a newly developed measure. The subscales from our measure were correlated, although it should be noted that they showed different relationships with the moderators in our explorative analysis. Lastly, a limitation of our study is that we cannot infer causal relationships from our retrospective study.

Future studies should evaluate the psychometric structure of SEL measures to gain more insight into the constructs from SEL and other related frameworks which have been proposed. This line of study should make clear whether the proposed constructs are strongly

related dimensions of a single core construct or whether the different components are empirically distinct components. Our study showed medium-to-strong correlations and uniform relationships for some moderators (i.e., the alumni program), but also differences between the different SEL measures (i.e., urban sites). These findings suggest a mixed pattern of both distinction but also relatedness for our SEL subscales, but it should be noted that all items were framed from a similar retrospective perspective on the Weekendschool. It is, therefore, important to evaluate the psychometric properties of SEL measures in adolescent samples, including non-experimental and experimental designs.

Experimental and longitudinal research is needed to demonstrate the effects of OST programs on SEL. This line of study should also make clear what the mechanism of change is for the observed positive relationship with taking part in the alumni program. Based on our study, it is not possible to conclude whether the alumni program has a positive effect on participants (i.e., an additional effect) or whether highly motivated students choose to take part in an alumni follow-up program (i.e., a selection effect). An experimental evaluation of an OST program with a structured alumni program with a follow-up measure may shed more light on which students participate and which effects this additional component may add to the effects of the regular curriculum.

In conclusion, our retrospective study showed that alumni generally evaluate the Dutch out-of-school Weekendschool program positively, varying from young adolescents who completed the program one year ago through adults who participated about 15 years ago.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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