 Action Research Prospectus

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**Practical Life in Education - Essential executive function skills from everyday life are vital to a child's autonomy, educational growth, and to assist focus and a feeling of order: An Action Research Study.**

This paper will address how training with an Educational Executive Functioning and Life Skills curriculum (intervention) can support the readiness of student success in a program for gifted students.

**Introduction**

School administrators are crucial in fostering executive function skills in students, enabling them to take responsibility for their learning without constant instructor assistance. Enhancing these skills in the early years is essential for academic achievement. Training with an Educational Executive Function and Life Skills curriculum (intervention) can support the readiness of student success in a program for gifted students. Formative activities can improve academic success by addressing childhood development stages. This approach is modeled after the Montessori approach to Practical Life skills.

Students should ideally develop executive function abilities throughout their formative years through daily experiences. Research indicates that this is not occurring enough among gifted children and students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), High Functioning Autism (HFA), or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Various executive function skills impact educational results, and instructors must know how to assist students who lack these skills to enhance their academic ability. An executive function program should be developed and executed to address these essential shortcomings.

This research introduces an intervention to assess executive function (EF) skills, specifically in potentially gifted and twice-exceptional students from 3rd to 8th grade. It is anticipated that most students will possess a level of knowledge commensurate with peers of the same age. The data gathered in this research will be utilized for an experimental investigation on a sample of middle school children, aiming to examine the impact of executive function (EF) on academic achievement within the school setting. Gaining a deeper understanding of each topic standard's executive function (EF) prerequisites will enable educators to design more efficacious curricula and customize targeted interventions for students, considering their individual EF profiles.

Impaired executive function skills can hinder the integration of gifted students, students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), High Functioning Autism (HFA), or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in conventional classrooms. Researchers have debated these individuals' specific executive function profiles, leading to efforts to separate them. The three essential executive function processes are inhibition, shifting/cognitive flexibility, and planning/working memory. ASD is associated with cognitive flexibility issues, leading to rigidity and repetitive behaviors. Poor cognitive flexibility preserves stereotypical behaviors and self-control issues, hindering daily life adaptation. Effective planning and working memory are essential for setting goals, prioritizing tasks, and initiating responses (Cohene, 2019). Students with low EF skills often have trouble making friends because their peers and teachers do not understand what is happening. This can make it harder for people to get to know each other in the classroom. Teachers should determine how to help students with HFA/ADHD fit in with their peers. A student's ability to get along with others in class could improve if they learned ways to deal with and lessen the effects of their lack of EF skills. If teachers knew more about students' lack of EF skills, they would be ready to teach differently by scaffolding and incorporating those methods into their regular lessons. If students with normal development knew about these problems caused by poor EF skills, they might be more willing to talk to and connect with students with HFA/ADHD in the classroom (Lima, 2021).

Montessori education provides children with purposeful activities with an obvious underlying rationale, giving individuals meaning and direction. Providing significant activities is essential for a school system based on self-determination since meaning drives involvement. Participating in an educational program focused on executive function skills will impact the preparedness of students to succeed. This study employs an action research methodology, using an executive function skills curriculum as a practical intervention to enhance practical life skills in schooling. It will assess self-reported awareness levels before and after the intervention.

**Statement of the Problem**

The problem is the organizational and attention problems gifted children experience. Organization, time management, study habits and skills, mentality, stress, sleep, and screens are the seven areas where disintegrating students exhibit skill deficiencies and unproductive practices. Executive functions (EFs) are high cognitive functions that enable individuals to respond to stimuli in different ways under different circumstances, delay responses, or not respond at all. These pathways promote goal-directed behavior planning. EFs grow progressively with life, some appearing as early as seven months. Children around four or five years of age have a significant increase in their capacity to block irrelevant information, recall and manage knowledge, and shift between tasks. EFs continue to grow and mature until people reach their mid-20s. EFs are also crucial for learning, and this proposal aims to introduce and demonstrate their importance in daily life (Arar, 2022). Enhancing early childhood executive function (EF) skills can help students regulate impulsivity and make choices that support goal achievement.

Higher-order cognitive functions, such as self-regulation abilities, substantially influence children's academic development. According to this project, Executive Functions directly affect critical abilities such as reading, arithmetic, and problem-solving. Academic success is related to motivation, effort, and self-efficacy. Recognizing oneself as a learner and creating effective tactics might help improve attitudes and school performance. Schools should teach students about their gifts, weaknesses, and techniques for empowering them. Students' task orientation, confidence, peer social skills, and self-regulation are predicted by EFs and challenge selection. Classrooms should push students to make difficult decisions by emphasizing work and learning. Training using an Educational Executive Functioning and Life Skills curriculum (intervention) can help children prepare for success in a gifted program.  The incorporation of executive function intervention into the curriculum has the potential to significantly improve academic content standards and give assistance to all students.

**Background**

Recent years have seen a surge in research on executive function in early infancy. Much of this research is based on the idea that executive function development occurs through the formation of a series of domain-general component processes (for example, working memory update, inhibitory control, and shifting). The evolution of executive function should be seen as the emergence of abilities to employ control to achieve specified objectives. Such objectives activate and are impacted by mental content acquired throughout development, such as information, beliefs, norms, values, and preferences. These are crucial when analyzing children's performance on executive function measurements. This explanation better explains empirical data than the component-process paradigm, generates precise, testable hypotheses, and has consequences for theory, measurement, and treatments (Doebel, 2020).

Executive functioning skills are essential for connecting one's knowledge with its practical application, enabling effective handling of various aspects of daily life. Implementing a program that encourages the development of practical life skills through educational activities is part of the approach. These skills are essential for improving a student's ability to flourish academically and in various aspects of life. Executive functions are high cognitive skills that allow people to react to stimuli in multiple ways depending on the circumstances, postpone responses, or not respond at all. These routes encourage goal-oriented behavior planning. Executive function develops gradually throughout childhood, with some emerging as early as seven months. Children at four or five years old show a significant boost in their ability to block extraneous information, retain and manage knowledge, and switch between activities. These skills and abilities develop and mature until individuals reach their mid-20s. These skills are also essential for learning, and this idea seeks to present and illustrate their significance in everyday life. Improving early childhood executive function skills may help children control their impulses and make decisions that promote goal accomplishment. Without strong executive function skills, students may begin school at a disadvantage that worsens with time. Studying these skills and treatments may enhance educational practices and student experience by including mindfulness and social skill programs. Strong executive function skills (cognitive flexibility, inhibitory control, and working memory) are critical for academic performance and relationships. Executive function skill development happens fast between the ages of three and six. Therefore, it is critical to group treatments and methods by age to better understand what works best with various age groups and student demographics (McCatharn, 2021).

As a school administrator for gifted education, the awareness that students have become less motivated and are not taking autonomous initiative in their work is increasingly evident. There are advantages of intrinsic instructional goals for teachers who desire to help students become autonomous and intrinsically motivated. Executive function skills serve as a crucial link between one's knowledge and the practical application of that knowledge to handle many aspects of everyday life effectively. These skills include setting objectives, devising strategies, and adjusting plans in response to obstacles, ultimately leading to success in both academic and personal spheres. Healthy executive function skills enable students to cultivate regular study and work habits, diminish distractibility, regulate impulses, and engage in acts advantageous to their current and future well-being (Arar, 2022).

Executive function skills are crucial for developing self-management abilities, resilience, and self-improvement. However, the explicit and systematic instruction of Executive Function skills is not universally provided to all learners. Proficiency in executive functioning results in enhanced achievement in academics, improved interpersonal connections, and crucially, facilitates the personal development of students, consequently promoting heightened self-assurance and self-regulation (2022).

Academic and personal success in school relies on students' ability to autonomously develop strategies for completing projects and meeting deadlines, necessitating a high level of competency in executive functioning. By engaging in deliberate practice, executive function skills enable students to overcome the disparity between their abilities and difficulties, teaching them to embrace assistance to become self-reliant. Structured instruction and introspection may enhance executive function skills and can be mastered through practice. Executive function skills enhance cognitive abilities, equipping students with mental strategies and efficient methods to maximize their learning. This empowers individuals to recognize their potential for personal growth and excel academically and throughout everyday practical life.

**Sociological Theory**

I analyze executive function skill inadequacies using sociological functionalism and social cognitive theory within this research project. These ideas suggest that executive function skills are not innate but cultivated through interactions and experiences. Structural functionalism is useful when looking at executive function inadequacies as individuals cannot comprehend or grasp all the separate elements of society; therefore, they do not feel they are a part of it.  Social cognitive theory is a useful lens for examining the relevance of executive function skills to academic achievement.

Durkheim discussed the concept of social cohesiveness that arises in cultures where people's relationships are influenced by the division of labor in economic and home responsibility. There is a breakdown in social solidarity and integration. When individuals cannot comprehend or grasp all the separate elements of society, they do not feel they are a part of it. Durkheim believes this occurs as soon as the totality of individuals cannot visualize social processes and boundaries and thus cannot comprehend the social whole at a glance. As a result, the social institutions grow opaque and lose the ability to maintain social linkage between individuals and groups (Morrison,2006).

According to Durkheim, social cohesiveness is a concept that emerges in communities where people are bonded to one another through their shared experiences of home and economic responsibilities. When social integration and solidarity break down, people experience a lack of sense of belonging since they cannot understand or appreciate the many components of society as a whole. According to Durkheim, this occurs when everyone cannot see social boundaries and processes, making it difficult to understand the social whole quickly. Consequently, social structures become more ambiguous and cannot preserve the social connections that bind people and communities (2006).

According to structural functionalism, all social structures, including the educational system, cooperate to serve society's requirements. According to this concept, society is a complex system made up of interconnected pieces that serve social and biological demands. It views societies as specialized parts that evolve towards common goals like stability, harmony, and growth. Structural functionalism is a consensus theory stating that society is based on mutual agreements and that creating and maintaining shared values and norms are crucial to society. Social change is viewed as a slow, orderly process (Wasilah, 2023).

Sociology of education is a sociological study that seeks to address the fundamental challenges of education. Sociology of education studies the link between society and education, specifically where social interactions occur. Educational institutions are implementing transformational management models and leadership styles, particularly transformative ones, to adapt to globalization. To effectively manage an educational unit, indicators must include a safe and orderly environment, a mission and quality targets, strong leadership, high expectations from staff, continuous improvement, continuous evaluation of academic and administrative elements, and communication support from parents and communities. Developing executive function skills curriculum to manifest functions can be transformative. Learning or education is the process of changing behavior to mature humans through teaching and training efforts and is the method, process, and act of educating. This includes implementing continuous evaluation of academic and administrative elements, utilizing results for development and quality improvement, and providing communication support and incentives from parents and communities (Wasilah,2023).

This link demonstrates how society may impact education, which can affect society. Sociology is concerned with society at all levels, from the macro (the whole society) through the meso (the learning process in schools) to the micro (the tiniest portion of society). According to the functional, structural view, the goal of education is to expose the younger generation to become members of society, which may then be utilized as a space to study, acquire information, modify behavior, and master the values required to appear as productive citizens. According to the systemic functional concept of society, it is a social framework comprising interconnected components that operate harmoniously. Changes to one element will affect other systems. The functional approach posits that society is cohesive because its members share a set of social ideals. Society, as a properly integrated social structure, is in balance. This school of thinking is known by several names, including the integration approach, the order approach, the balanced approach, and the structural-functional approach. Structural functionalists think that education may be transformational. The structural-functional approach sees society as a network of interrelated pieces. Mutualism exists in society through reciprocal interactions and symbiosis. A system is dynamic when it searches for equilibrium. Social dysfunction or social disparities may eventually be rectified independently due to the adaption and institutionalization processes. System changes are not revolutionary and are implemented gradually through tweaks. The value of consensus in the integration process cannot be emphasized. Every civilization has a unique collection of subsystems, each with structure and functional value to the greater community (Smith,2020). Structural Functionalism states that things occur in society for a specific function, maintaining stability and order and how to create order. Change can happen with life interactions. Neuro-divergent and gifted students require holistic benefits that can transform academics and cognitive development.

Developmental psychology is currently confused, with numerous theories attempting to explain how people learn. Structuralist theories like Piaget's and Chomsky's have been pushed aside, leading to many confusing theories. These include social learning theory, rule learning theory, skill theory, information processing theory, dialectical theory, neo-Piagetian theory, ecology theory, and modularity views. Behaviorism, Freudian, Gestalt, and Piagetian theories were once the main ideas in the field. However, the current language used in theory discussions in developmental psychology is compared to the Tower of Babel.

The Theory of Cognitive Development, proposed by Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, posits that children's intellect transforms as they mature. Children's cognitive development is focused on acquiring information and constructing or forming a mental representation of their environment (Gruber et al.,1977).

According to Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development, social interactions constantly alter children's ideas and behaviors, which differ greatly throughout cultures. According to Vygotsky's theory, a person's ability to grow relies on their interactions with other people and the resources culture offers to shape their worldview. For children who are neuro-divergent and have difficulty with executive functioning, this is challenging. Three methods exist for transmitting cultural tools from one person to another: collaborative learning taught learning, and imitation learning. The interdependence of macro-social (cultural-historical) and micro-social (interpersonal) impacts on cognitive development and social influences on learning in general is emphasized in Vygotsky's work. While Piaget's theory identifies internal factors as the primary drivers of cognitive development, learners are thought to need the influence of external social influences in order to progress (Huang, 2021).   
 According to Vygotsky, language is the foundation of awareness and allows for cognition. Without language, human development would not have been able to progress above the basic senses and perceptions seen in lesser mammals. Additionally, language was seen to be a cultural instrument that promotes social interaction, the formation of attitudes and behaviors, and the spread of culture itself (2021).  
 Vygotsky's theory of social influences on cognitive development highlights the role of cultural, historical, and interpersonal factors in shaping a student's mental development. He believes that higher mental development is inseparably dependent on social interactions, and new understanding is created in social interactions. In practical teaching, scaffolding involves continuous evaluation of a student's progress and modifying tasks or objectives. It is vital to transition away from conventional educational techniques and conventions and instead promote tools that enhance students' self-efficacy in learning and academic satisfaction inside the classroom (Munoz, 2016). This might be seen as efficacious in The Montessori Practical Life Skills and Waldorf's emphasis on Real-World education. These educational views support the development of critical thinking skills and the recognition of complexities in both academic and social contexts. Integrating executive function supports and curriculum into educational contexts aims to empower students to realize their highest potential fully.

**Faith-Based Analyzation of the Problem- (“7 Universal Human Longings”)**

The author describes the seven themes of justice, love, spirituality, beauty, freedom, truth, and power as "broken signposts". These themes are universal human longings that are true signs that a good and wise Creator makes humans. However, these signposts often need to deliver on their promises, leading people to draw different conclusions about them (Wright,2020). This is in line with Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, which postulates that humans are driven by five main types of needs: self-actualization, safety, love, esteem, and physiological requirements. A framework used in education to comprehend people's basic needs. It consists of four levels: basic needs (like food, thirst, and sleep), safety needs (like security and protection from harm), belongingness needs (like acceptance, affection, and friendship), and esteem needs (like feeling competent, strong, and successful). These levels are based on Maslow's theory that the appearance of one need depends on the prior satisfaction of another, making it essential for complex development processes like learning. In education, these basic needs include physical equipment, supplies, and technological-related demands. The hierarchy also includes safety needs, belongingness needs, and esteem needs, which are essential for a person's development and success (Hopper,2020).  
 The way in which each of these signposts fails corresponds to the way Jesus of Nazareth went to his death, with a kangaroo trial, friends betraying and denying him, truth sneered at, and so on. This is why Jesus's crucifixion still functions across different human cultures and as a sign of hope, pointing to a God radically different from all other gods (Wright,2020).  
 For these signposts to work as outward-facing signs of the presence and reality of the true God, followers of Jesus need to use those signposts to frame their vocations. By working on projects demonstrating a passion for justice, spirituality, beauty, and the proper and humanizing exercise of power, it will be apparent that the God of whom they speak is indeed present, however mysteriously, and working in the world to accomplish his new creation (2020).  
 John's gospel is the gospel of creation and new creation, of "witness" to Jesus and the Father, of the Greeks coming to the feast and the victory over the dark powers. Through the power of the Spirit of Jesus the Messiah, crucified and risen from the dead, these signposts can become genuine signposts, mended signals, and missional marker posts. They will point more clearly, in the mercy of God, to the cross of Jesus and his resurrection as the start and sign of the new creation.  
 The seven themes of justice, love, spirituality, beauty, freedom, truth, and power serve as broken signposts indicating the presence of the real God and the new creation. Each philosophy, religion, political system, and society has its take on these signposts. They gain importance when a crisis emerges; if neglected, they may seek retribution. Identifying and comprehending these signs, mindfully dealing with their relevance, and taking into account the distinctive ways of others are all part of living an informed life. These seven entities may act similarly to safety measures, with access to the innermost safe permitted only when all seven entities are present and working together. However, the signs are confusing and defective. Humans consistently see the world as a unified entity that should be logical. There are several indications or hints that may help determine the intended meaning or logic it should possess. However, circumstances do not unfold as they first seem to imply (Wright,2020).

Exploring the pathophysiological pathways between depressive symptoms and executive dysfunction may aid in identifying biomarkers that elevate the susceptibility to dementia-related conditions and therapeutic therapies. It is important to find protective variables for behavioral therapies that may sustain excellent executive functioning while dealing with depressed symptoms and lower the risk of cognitive impairment. Christian education emphasizes the importance of developmental considerations, rooted in the command of Moses in Deuteronomy 6 and Jesus' disciple-making. Early educational pioneers struggled to find teachers with the necessary skills for classroom teaching. We continue to need to equip teachers with the skills needed for spiritual nurturing, development, and discipleship of followers of Christ. Christian education is an intentional process that helps individuals be formed in Christ, nurtured through Scripture by the Holy Spirit and the human teacher, and encouraged to continual development into mature disciples of Christ. Children struggle with abstract language, so teaching them concrete content from the Scriptures is essential. By introducing these concepts, children can better understand and apply the principles of Christianity and the Bible. Jean Piaget's theory suggests that the purpose of education is development, with the ultimate goal of glorifying God by becoming like Christ in every aspect of life. The Christian educator's task is to foster people's stories so they will become like Christ, who more fully love, know, and glorify God. Learning is a social activity, and good education must involve the whole body of believers, the church. Fowler's definition of faith as a universal human phenomenon applies to the Christian faith, where God is the ultimate environment and relationships are transformed. The Gospel offers a lens for understanding life issues, with the assurance that God loves us and controls our destiny (Williamson, 2006).

Gifted and twice-exceptional students are cognitively advanced and have heightened intensities that interact with their cognitive abilities. This critical distinction between intelligent and gifted students is crucial as it highlights the difference in intensity. Demanding immediate compliance from gifted students may not work, as it may not have the child's heart. The Bible in Isaiah 40:11 emphasizes the importance of a shepherd's care, as he tends to his flock like a shepherd, gathering lambs and carrying them close to his heart. Therefore, it is essential to understand and respect the unique needs and intensities of gifted students to ensure their well-being and success (Borrnick,2015). Christian teachers are responsible for supporting gifted students' social and emotional needs, as they may be susceptible to depression due to their early understanding of moral and intellectual concepts, requiring different and additional support (Cannaday,2017).

1 Corinthians 14:40 emphasizes the importance of organization and support for children's executive function abilities. Proverbs 22:6 encourages children to follow their path, even as they grow older. Gifted children often struggle to find friends who share their academic interests, leading to identity uncertainty and individualism. It is crucial to help them recognize their identity in Christ to connect with them. Executive functions, essential for daily living and independence, decline with age and can be further compromised by depressive symptoms. Understanding the pathophysiological mechanisms underlying the association between depressive symptoms and executive impairment can help identify biomarkers that increase the risk for dementia-related disorders and potential interventions. It is also crucial to identify protective factors for behavioral interventions that maintain optimal executive functioning in the presence of depressive symptoms and reduce cognitive impairment risk.

Although many people know the well-known verse, John 3:16, about God "so loved the world" that he sent his Son to rescue it, they may not understand that a profound declaration about justice immediately follows it. God's light will reveal wrongdoing done in darkness. Justice is an expression of God's love. The arrival of God's light and love symbolizes the ultimate reconciliation of all things. In Jewish culture, the ultimate revelation of "justice" was the "passing of judgment"(Wright, 2020, pp.14-16). The life of Jesus provides a fresh perspective on reality. The triumph against corruption and death frames a new creation (Wright, 2020, p. 192).

**Ethical Considerations**

* Develop a detailed plan for the intervention
* Link the Intervention to sociological and faith-based analysis
* Discuss and address potential ethical issues related to the intervention

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