

Mitt Valg EVALUATION

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Mitt Valg Training – Reflections by Professor Kirsti Lonka, University of Helsinki, Finland

In socio-emotional learning (SEL) there are five important areas to improve that also Lions Quest (LQ) promotes. First, both teachers and students need to become aware of their own values, thoughts, hopes, and feelings in different interactions and situations. Such *self-awareness* helps separating one's own thoughts, goals, and feelings from those of others. Self-awareness makes subjective consideration possible and alleviates and speeds up decision-making. This is a prerequisite for effective communication. Second, when people become aware of their own thoughts and feelings, they can express them clearly to other people : *self-management* deals with the ability to regulate one's emotions and behavior in an appropriate way in various situations. Even adults may have difficulties in managing their own needs and desires, which may complicate human relations. Third, *social awareness* has to do with the ability to place value on building and maintaining personal relationships. A socially aware person understands the importance and value of the experience of being listened to. Such a skill helps one to understand, what and how other people think, experience, and feel. Fourth, we need to learn *relationship skills* that are not simple at all, but are learnable and teachable according to our research. We need to learn how to communicate and interact in a constructive way. For instance, listening skills are especially challenging even for people who appear sociable; sometimes very talkative people who think that they are good communicators may have deficiencies in listening. Finally, *responsible decision-making* refers to the capability of making ethically sustainable and socially constructive decisions. We all need to provide explanations for the decisions we have made or comply with decisions made by others.

Teacher learning is seldom in the focus during interventions. We tend to assume that social interaction is something that comes naturally from such educated professionals as teachers. Over the years, we have developed sensitive measures to look at changes in these “soft skills”. Dr. Markus Talvio's doctoral dissertation in 2014 was a pioneering study in the field. He showed that Finnish teachers benefited from SEL training and the effects were quite long lasting. Since that, we have carried out evaluations of Lions Quest programs around the world. Usually, the effects have to do with teachers' confidence and readiness to teach such skills. We looked at how teachers' values, expectations, self-efficacy and readiness to teach SEL improve during training. We showed in many studies that such interventions help teachers to value SEL, to trust themselves and to apply what they have learned into their daily practice.

To take one further step, we looked at whether students benefit from their teachers' training in SEL. When we compared teachers and their students in five European countries, it appeared that when it comes to teenagers, the results are not quite clear and they are related to the developmental phase of the students. Younger students of age 8-11 appeared to benefit in terms of developing positive change in their self-awareness and in self-management, which are the starting points of socio-emotional learning. Also in the Norwegian version of LQ, *Mitt Valg*, this appeared to be the case: the students were 11 years old on average and some improvement took place. The students do not immediately start learning after their teachers have participated in the training.

It is quite rare to see systematic quasi-experimental studies on socio-emotional learning (SEL) that cover both teachers and their students. The present report shows how we can do this in the Norwegian context. In Norway, *Mitt Valg* training appears to be a popular and functional way of teaching socio-emotional learning. The idea is to help teachers to first learn themselves and then support their students to learn all the above-mentioned skills.

Are the results of the Norwegian Mitt Valg training similar to those of other countries? The results of the present report are in line with our global investigations. During *Mitt Valg*, the teachers reported constant increase in their competencies in teaching SEL and promoting positive learning. They also found the program highly important. In addition, their students' self-awareness and self-management regarding SEL improved after their teachers' training. Further, many Norwegian teachers reported that they started to apply *Mitt Valg* activities and ideas in their daily practice. These are excellent results for such a brief intervention.

The intervention in Norway took place at a challenging time during the Covid-19 years from 2020 to 2021. During such challenging times, it is more important than ever to promote social interaction. It appears that the LQ trainers in Norway are doing excellent work. In the future, we shall be happy to develop new approaches to social and emotional learning that can be applied in the ever changing contexts of learning and the surrounding society. We have started to develop blended and hybrid learning solutions that can help teachers to keep up with their good work regardless of the situation at hand.

Evaluation Project in a Nutshell

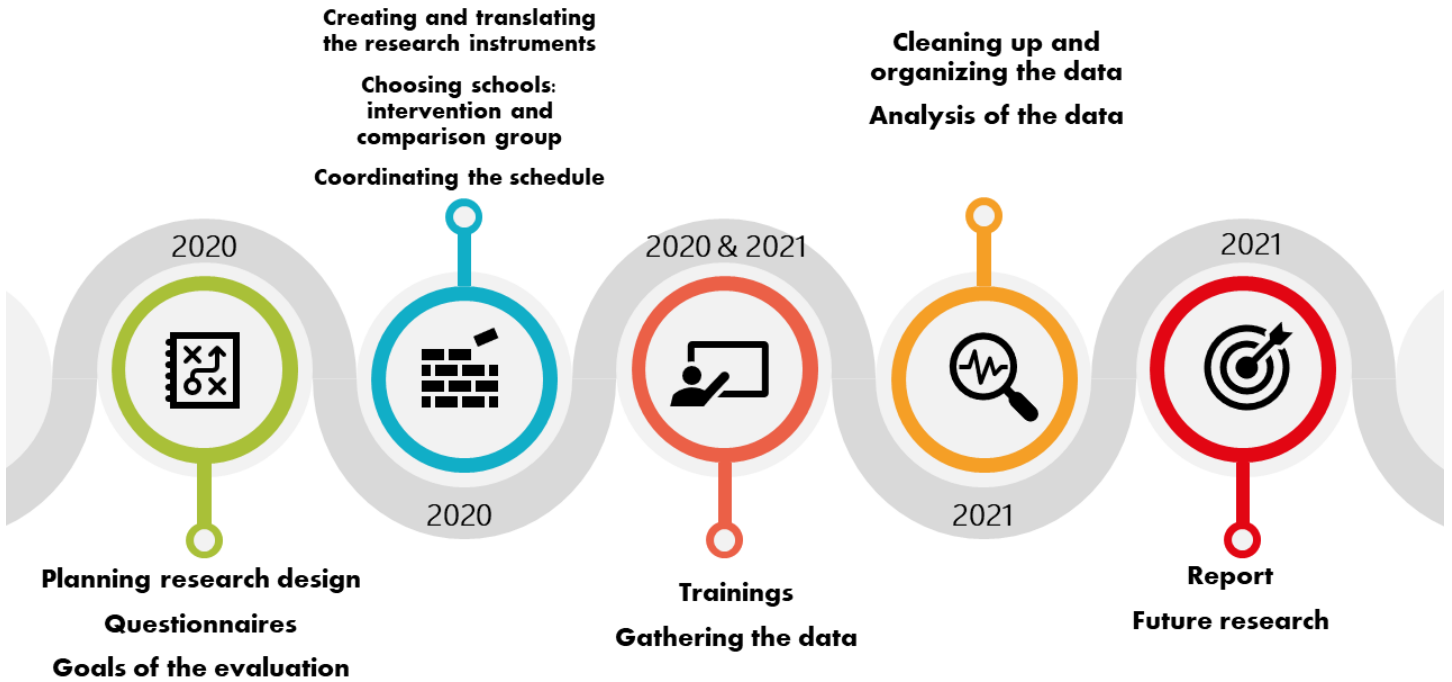
The goal of the present evaluation is to explore the effectiveness of the Mitt Valg -training on the teachers participating in the training and their students. The aims of the evaluation were to investigate the impact of the training on:

- 1) **teachers** ` readiness to change and implement SEL -goals and social and social and emotional teaching competencies*
- 2) **students** ` social and emotional competence in five areas of SEL.*

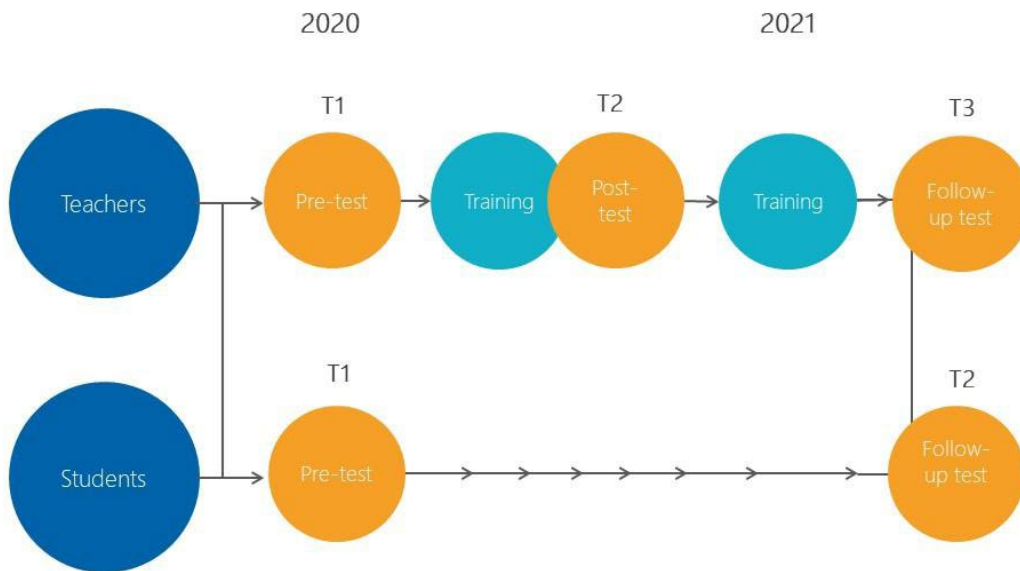
Training and data gathering happened during the years 2020 and 2021. The evaluation process included two groups: **intervention** group and **comparison** group. Intervention group teachers participated in two training periods and were involved in three data gathering points and their students were involved in two data gathering points. Comparison group teachers did not participate in training, but data were gathered from the teachers and students of the comparison groups two times: approximately at the same time as the intervention group data.



Project Timeline



Trainings and data gathering



Mitt Valg!

What is Mitt Valg - training?

Mitt Valg -training (internationally known as Lions Quest -training) is an international Lions Quest program for developing a positive learning environment and social and emotional competency. It has been implemented in 105 countries and translated into over 45 languages. The duration of the teacher training workshop in Norway is 1.5-days including a refresher workshop after 3-6 months (Kiefer et al. 2022). The idea is that the teachers gather for a full day to learn basic knowledge on SEL and to adopt skills for conducting Lions Quest in the classroom. After the first workshop day the teachers implement LQ in the classroom testing and collecting experiences of the implementation process. In the refresher workshop the teachers deepen their understanding of the LQ by sharing their experiences, ideas and concerns. In this case the teachers had two training models, either face-to-face or online, during the evaluation process.

Evaluation procedure and data collection

What was the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the evaluation was to investigate the impact of the training on:

- 1) **teachers'** readiness to change and implement SEL (social and emotional learning) -goals and social and emotional teaching competencies
- 2) **students'** social and emotional competence in five areas of SEL.

Training and data collection happened in 16 elementary schools in Norway. The evaluation process lasted almost two years, starting in the spring of 2020, and ended after all the training and data collection in the fall of 2021. The evaluation process included two groups of students: intervention group and comparison group.

Translations were conducted by back translation -method in collaboration with the Norwegian team. Questions and statements were also modified suitable for the study context.

How was data collected?

The evaluation was conducted using digital questionnaires. All participants answered the questionnaire using personal code for ensuring the anonymity of the evaluation. Anonymity means that there is no way for anyone to personally identify participants in the study or trace the data to an individual participant.

All participants, teachers, students, and their parents (or guardians) were informed about the subject, content, purpose and nature of the study in advance, as well as about the tasks of the researcher and examinees. Research permits were also required from the students` parents or guardians.

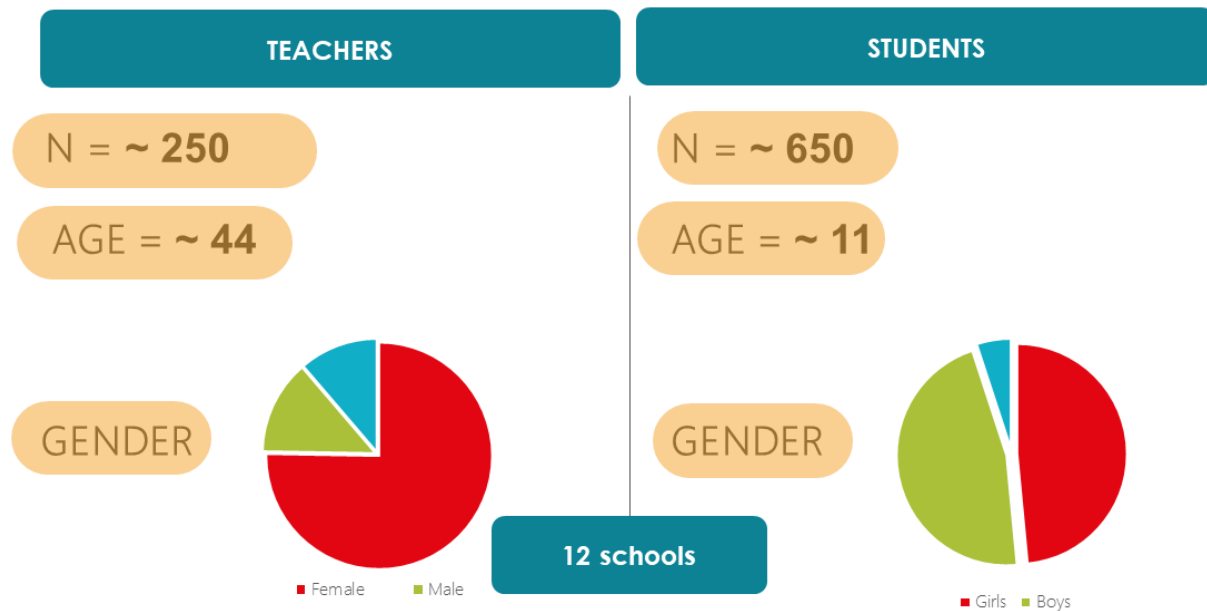
The data management emphasized utmost confidentiality and the anonymity of the participants and evaluation procedures exercised strict academic research ethics: the research consent included that only researchers in the evaluation team could access the anonymous data. The participants were also told that they are allowed to withdraw their participation in the study at any time without giving an explanation.

In total, about 300 teachers and 800 students from 16 schools participated in the evaluation. 250 teachers and 650 students from the intervention group and 40 teachers and 150 students from the comparison group. The answers were downloaded later to the database and analysed.

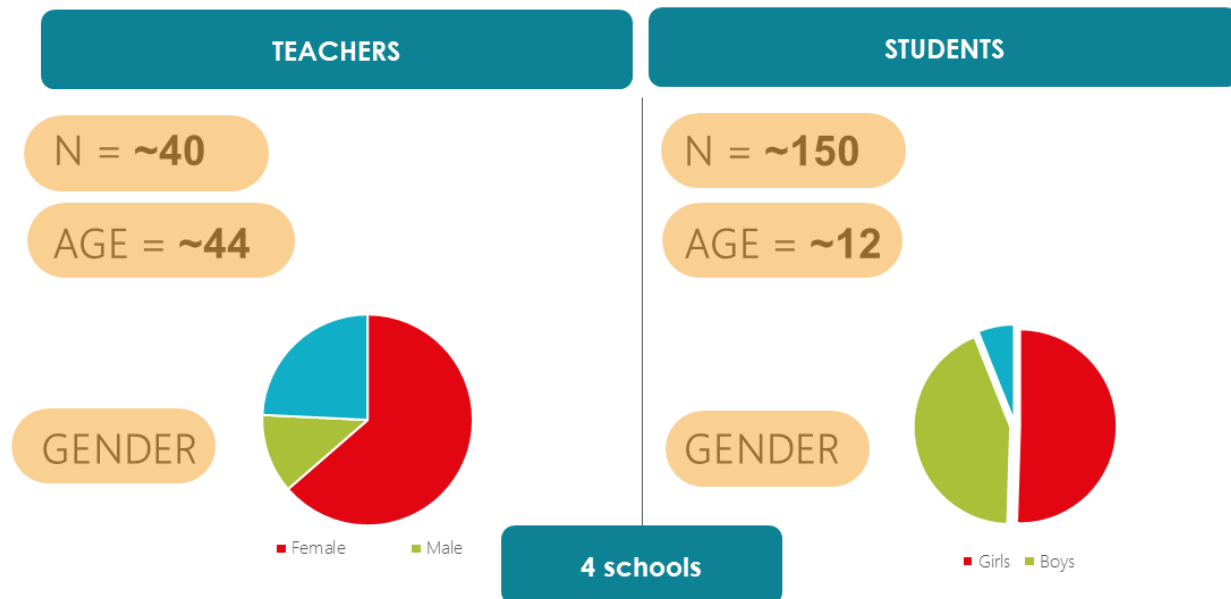
The intervention group included the teachers and their students who participated in the Mitt Valg -training. The comparison group consisted of teachers and their students who answered the questionnaire but did not receive any training. The intervention and the comparison group answered the questionnaires about the same time (within the same week).

The data collection was organized in close collaboration with the headmasters of the participating schools to motivate the whole school community to take part in the evaluation.

Intervention Participants



Comparison Participants



Measures

What measures were used?

Teachers` readiness to change and implement social and emotional learning goals was measured using two scales: self-reported **importance and skills**. Scale for importance was used to investigate how important teachers see specific SEL -goals and aims related to developing a positive learning environment. Statements included for instance: “It is primarily the teacher's duty to create a classroom environment where all students feel valued”, “It is the teacher’s duty to teach interactive skills such as listening and conversation skills” and “It is the teacher’s duty to teach emotional skills such as self-control”.

Scale for skills was used to investigate how skillful teachers experienced specific SEL -goals and skills related to developing a positive learning environment. Statements included for instance: “I am very skilled at creating a classroom environment where all students feel valued”, “I am very skilled at teaching interactive skills such as listening and conversation skills” and “I am very skilled at teaching emotional skills such as self-control”.

Students` social and emotional competence was measured by Social Emotional Competence Questionnaire (SECQ) (Zhou & Ee, 2012), which has been designed to evaluate how competent children (from grades 4 to 12) are in five elements of social and emotional learning (SEL) (www.casel.org). The five elements of SEL are very closely related to the skills that Mitt Valg -trainings are emphasizing.

The five elements of the SECQ are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Self-awareness means the ability to be aware of one's inner life: emotions, thoughts, values, goals, strengths and how these elements are related to one's behavior. Sample item: “I know when I am moody”. *Social awareness* refers to one's ability to read social cues and to respond to other persons` feelings. This skill is naturally closely linked to the notion of empathy. Sample item: “If someone is sad, angry or happy, I believe I know what they are thinking”. *Self-management* means the ability to manage one's own emotions and impulses. Sample item: “I can control the way I feel when something bad happens”. *Relationship management* relates to one's ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. Some studies have stated that students who can establish and maintain good relationships with peers are also more engaged with their academic activities. Sample item: “I always try to comfort my friends when they are sad”. *Responsible decision-making* refers to one's ability to consider different kinds of factors when making decisions. These factors are related to

e.g. safety, societal and ethical aspects. Responsible decision-making includes the idea of building a sense of social responsibility. Sample item: “When making decisions, I take into account the consequences of my actions”.

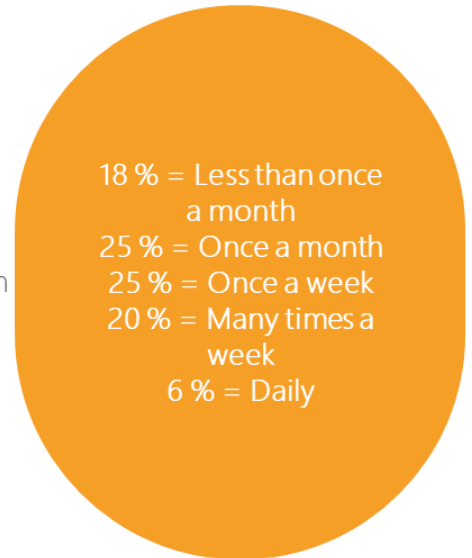
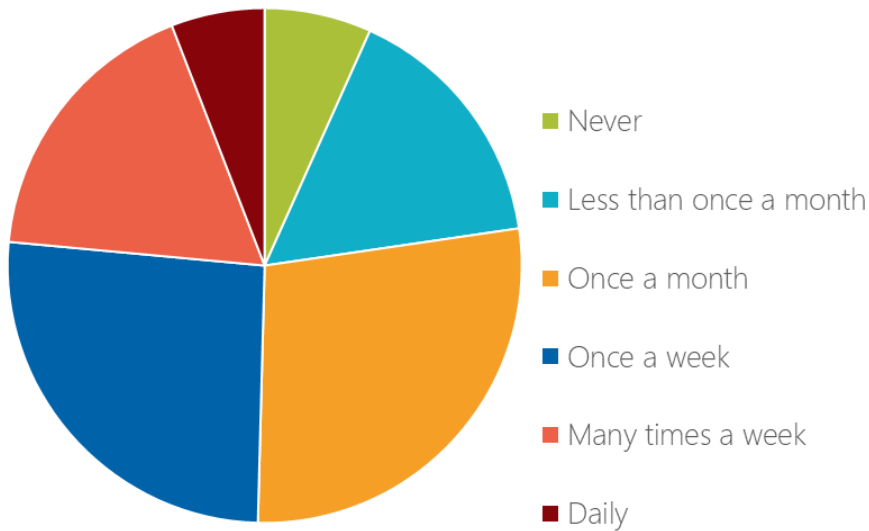
Students rated these items using a 6-point Likert scale with response options ranging from “completely disagree” to “completely agree”. This categorization of social and emotional competence is based on SEL model developed by CASEL (www.casel.org)

Results

How often have teachers used Mitt Valg -methods during the evaluation process?

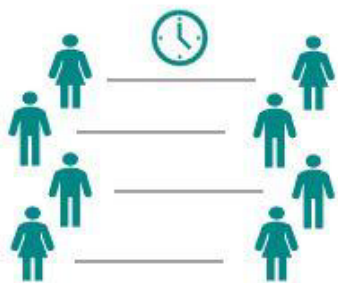
Teachers reported very active use of Mitt Valg -methods during the evaluation process. More than half of the teachers reported that they use more than once a week methods they learned from Mitt Valg -training. **This appears to indicate that teachers experienced Mitt Valg -training useful and important for every day teaching practices.** Teachers also reported that Mitt Valg -training was overall a positive experience: the training was useful both for teaching and for outside of the school practices and overall important for professional development.

How often teachers used Mitt Valg-methods during the evaluation process?



Did the training have an effect?

The analysis was done by paired t-test that is used to determine whether the mean of the *variable* (for example competence) is the same or different in two *groups of participants* or at *two different time points*. For example, we can use this test to investigate whether there is a difference in workers' competence before and after undertaking professional development training. Here the *variable* would be the measured competence and the two *groups* would be the two different "time points", competence before the training and competence after the training.



Is there a **difference** in a **group** between **two points in time**



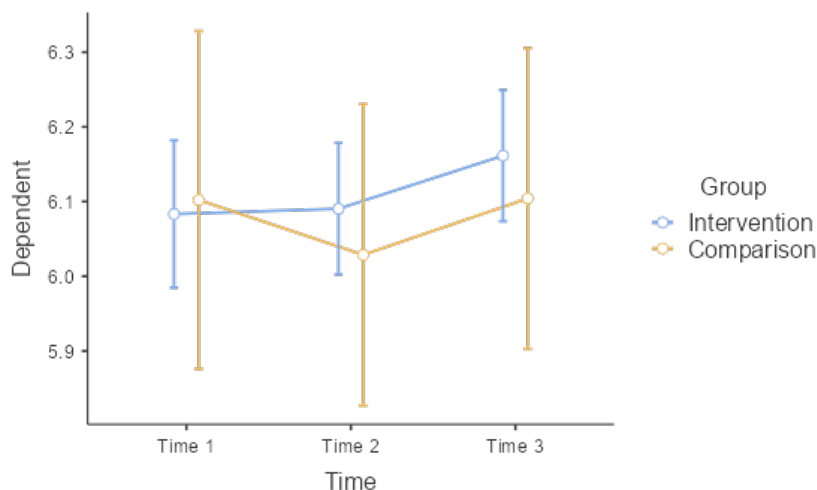
Mean value of all deviation

The data was analysed by comparing differences of measured means between teacher`s pre-, post-and follow-up data gathering (T1, T2 and T3) and students' pre- and follow-up data gathering within the intervention and comparison group.

Data from both teachers and their students were analysed in a similar way. First the mean sum scores in each measuring point were calculated and then they were used as variables in further analysis. Repeated measures ANOVA was used to examine the effect of the intervention with regards to statistically significant change over time across groups in the variables by estimating the “time*group interaction. The analyses were conducted with IBM SPSS 27 and Jamovi 2.2.2.0.

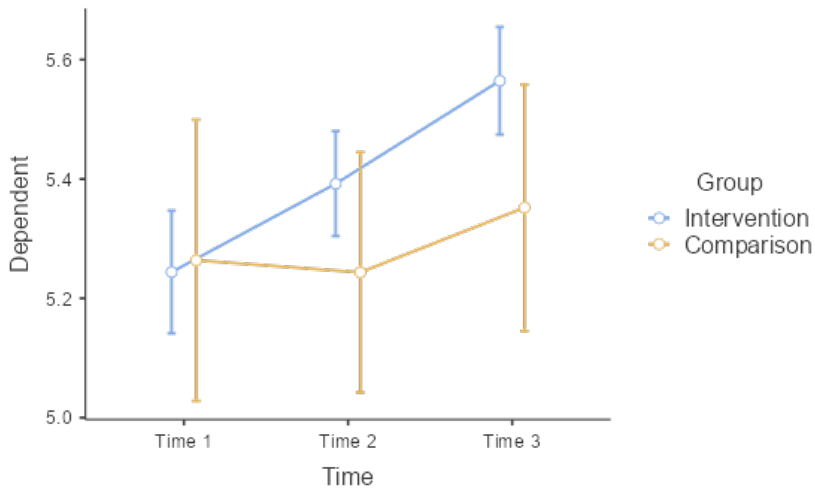
Teachers` readiness to change and implement social and emotional learning

Regarding the three measuring points (T1, T2, T3) the intervention group improved in **perceived importance** from T1 towards T3. The comparison group started from higher, but they collapsed around T2 and did not recover on T3. Figure 1 shows that the time*group interaction was not significant between measuring points T1, T2 and T3 ($F = 1.57, p = .21$). Figure below shows the development of teachers' perceived importance in three measuring points.



Regarding the **sense of competence**, both the intervention group and the comparison group started from the same level (T1). However, the intervention group scored higher in both T2 and T3 whereas the comparison group remained on the level on T2 and then slightly improved on T3. This time*group interaction between the intervention and the comparison group in the sense of competence in measuring points T1, T2 and T3 was statistically significant ($F = 9.52, p < .001, \eta^2g = .002$) showing that the intervention group scored significantly higher on the measuring points T2 and T3

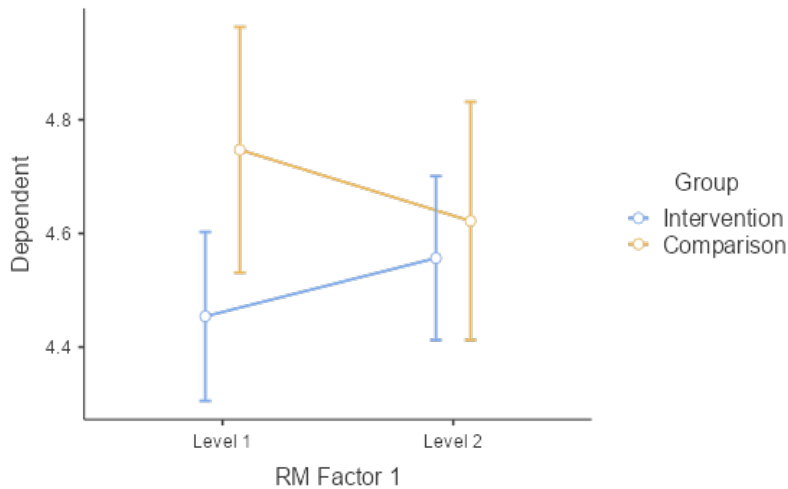
than the comparison group. Figure below shows the development of teachers' sense of competence in three measuring points.



The results of the present study indicate that the teachers felt to be more competent in teaching SEL and promoting a positive learning environment after the Mitt Valg - teacher training. This result did not drop in the long run. Teachers' perceived importance did not change during the intervention in the short run or in the long run. This confirms and highlights the impact of the Mitt Valg – training for the increase of the experienced skill levels.

Students' social and emotional competence

Repeated measures ANOVA indicated that among the intervention group students' SEL improved during the intervention. Among the comparison group the development was negative. The figure below shows the statistically significant interaction between these two groups. ($F = 6.73, p = 0.01, \eta^2G = 0.005$).



Students' social and emotional competence among the intervention group slightly increased whereas social and emotional competence among the comparison group decreased during their teachers' training. However, since the intervention group started from a lower level than the comparison group in the first measuring point and after their teachers' training the intervention group reached only the same level as the comparison group it is difficult to draw strong conclusions about the benefits from Mitt Valg -teacher training to the students.

Conclusions

It can be concluded that the Norwegian version of Lions Quest (Mitt Valg) intervention appeared to improve teachers' sense of competence to teach SEL at school. In addition, findings showed that after the intervention, most teachers were willing to implement LQ as part of their teaching at least once a week. This study showed that Mitt Valg helped Norwegian teachers to feel competent in teaching SEL. The results of this study are aligned with our previous studies of LQ teacher workshops in different countries (Talvio, Berg, Litmanen, & Lonka, 2016; Talvio, Hietajärvi, & Lintunen, 2021; Talvio, Hietajärvi, Matischek-Jauk, & Lonka, 2019)

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