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The Effect of Pet Ownership on ESL Students' U.S. Academic Success

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## PET OWNERSHIP AND ESL STUDENTS' U.S. ACADEMIC SUCCESS

### **Abstract**

This study examines the academic success of English as a second language (ESL) students based on ownership of and/or relationship with a pet, due to pets' ability to benefit and support their owners. A survey was compiled for middle school, ESL students in the Fayetteville, Arkansas school district. The goal of the study was to discover if pet ownership has an effect on ESL student academic success in terms of the academic, social, and emotional aspects of school. It was found that pets aid in some academic aspects of school but more so in the social and emotional aspects such as making friends, extracurricular involvement, bullying, and feeling overwhelmed.

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## The Effect of Pet Ownership on ESL Students' U.S. Academic Success

### **Introduction**

Academic success is something for which many have strived. It is composed of good attendance/missing school infrequently, doing homework and assignments well and on time, and putting time and energy into learning. These efforts then lead to understanding of the material and consequently good grades. This is doing well in school for most students and parents. That, however, is not a reality for some students. Although many students do achieve academic success, English as a second language (ESL) students are consistently out-performed by their native, English-speaking peers (Derwing, DeCorby, Ichikawa, & Jamieson, 1999).

There are ESL programs in public schools that service students who have a first language other than English. Every school wants its students to succeed, but ESL students have the additional challenges of a different culture and a different language at school than at home. For this reason, they have a disadvantage in school due to the inconsistency. "Students who speak English as a second language generally appear to be less successful academically than their monolingual peers" (Derwing, et al, 1999).

Academic success is harder to come by as an ESL student, and pets could help in this situation, as they can provide comfortable and secure environments for their owners. Research done in hospitals suggests that pets can have a calming and confidence-boosting effect (Jalongo, Astorino, & Bomboy, 2004). Additionally, the study reported that pets have the tendency to lower heart rate and blood pressure which moderate stress (Jalongo, et al, 2004).

In this study of middle school, ESL students, in Fayetteville, Arkansas, research was done to determine if the students think pets are beneficial to them in terms of their academic

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success. More specifically, survey responses will show whether pets are most helpful in academic areas of school, such as homework and grades, or in social and emotional aspects of school, such as making friends, involvement in extracurricular activities, bullying, and feeling overwhelmed. The research aims to fill gaps in the literature by connecting ESL students and the potential benefit of pets. A great deal of literature exists on education and academic success in addition to the literature on pets and their influences on people. There were little to no resources that connected the two areas of study, especially in ESL.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the animal-child bond and its potential benefits in the ESL student's life. This project will be a study of middle school students in the Fayetteville School District in Arkansas and the effect of pets on their academic success.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- 1) Do ESL students think pet animals help them in terms of academic success?
- 2) What is the perceived effect of pets on social and emotional aspects of school?

### **Theoretical Framework**

Educational shortcomings are a result of many factors, including level of cognitive functioning, level of academic skills, social and emotional state, family background and dynamics, learning style, and possible learning disability (Klesmer, 1994). In ESL students, all these factors must be considered in addition to social and linguistic history; migration history; past schooling experiences; current home, school, and community language; and motivation and attitude toward a new culture, language, and school (Kelsmer, 1994).

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Maslow's hierarchy of human needs is set up in a pyramid, with the most basic needs, that must be fulfilled, at the bottom. Moving up the pyramid, there are additional needs that can be sought after the previous one(s) have been met. The most basic of these needs are physiological needs: sleep, food, water, air. Next are safety needs: security, protection, order. Third on the pyramid are belonging needs: acceptance within a group. After belonging needs are esteem needs: self-image and respect. Fifth and final is self-actualization: personal growth and development (Liu, 2016).

Maslow's hierarchy can be applied to social and emotional state, family background and dynamics, and motivation of ESL students. Social and emotional state falls into the third and fourth categories of Maslow's hierarchy: belonging needs and esteem needs. Family background and dynamics could fit as low as safety needs, if a student's home life is unstable. Motivation of ESL students is encompassed in the entire hierarchy. Motivation for the next step can only commence when the previous need has been met. This means these students must meet all four previous steps of the pyramid before educational components like problem solving and creativity can be achieved. The intention of this study is to assess if pets can help ESL students meet these lower needs and progress in their U. S. education.

### **Literature Review**

Hauseman reported educational success to be measured in graduation rates and test scores (2015). Factors affecting those measures include student engagement, teacher support, and a sense of school membership (Kelly & Zhang, 2016). Engagement is defined as active participation in activities (Kelly & Zhang, 2016). Teacher support is shown through teachers taking an interest in their students and praising their work (Kelly & Zhang, 2016). A sense of school membership and social connectedness are a part of overall alignment to school (Kelly & Zhang, 2016). A student's engagement fluctuates throughout the day, and a central element to maintaining it is choosing appropriately challenging tasks; "the most engaging tasks are those that are neither too easy nor too difficult for students" (Kelly & Zhang, 2016). Not only is social

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support important for average students but especially for “Latino students identified as at risk of school failure” (Kelly & Zhang, 2016).

A more specific look at the measures of ESL student success include: oral expression and listening comprehension, passage comprehension and writing samples, spontaneous writing, reading, picture vocabulary tests, and word opposites (Klesmer, 1994). In Klesmer’s study, ESL students had a mean score of 25 in reading compared to the norm of 44 for twelve-year-old students; in picture vocabulary, ESL students had a mean score 57 compared to the norm of 124; in word opposites, ESL students had a mean score of 24 compared to the norm of 33 (1994).

Derwing, et al also report stigma and school relationships are important factors in ESL student success (1999). There is a stigma related to being an ESL student. They are thought of as different because they are the kids that “talk weird” (Derwing, et al, 1999). Racism, whether conscious or not, is present in schools. “The poor Chinese girl sitting there alone” (Derwing, et al, 1999) will get treated differently anyway, and additionally, she attends an ESL class every day. Derwing, et al also found, however, that “developing relationships with native English-speaking classmates, both socially and academically, was an important contributing factor to a successful school experience” (1999). Of the teacher-student relationship, ESL students expressed dissatisfaction and frustration with the lack of communication and interest in getting to know them. However, any teacher who is willing to put forth extra effort on the behalf of an ESL student is then singling them out as opposed to helping them fit in by treating them “just like any other student” (Derwing, et al, 1999).

According to Derwing, et al, ESL students are not as academically successful as native, English-speaking students (1999). In their study, high school, ESL students had a 54% completion rate compared to the 70% for all other students (Derwing, et al, 1999). This is

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because ESL students often face many challenges in school, including a teacher's failure to recognize ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences; a lack of trust between student and teacher; and education gaps in their first language (Derwing, et al, 1999). The students' level of English when they enter the school system has an effect on their chances of graduating. Beginners have a 5% chance of completing high school, intermediates a 30% chance, and advanced students a 50% chance (Derwing, et al, 1999). A study that looked at ESL student age and length of residency, determined that it takes at least six years for ESL students to catch up to the norms of native speakers, if they accomplish it at all (Klesmer, 1994).

The social environment is critical for human adaptation (Bryant, 1990). Pets can have positive developmental benefits for a child, such as social competence and cooperation (Poresky & Hendrix, 1990). Additionally, pets can provide "...mutuality, enduring affection, self-enhancing affection, and exclusivity of relationship" (Bryant, 1990). Specifically, companion animals provide "contact comfort" and self-concept (Bryant, 1990). A companion animal's constant, positive responsiveness has a great capacity to shape a child's ego in a constructive manner. "The age when children had their first pet is associated with self-concept" (Poresky & Hendrix, 1990). There are two important forms of connectedness: social support and the need to care about people or other living things (Bryant, 1990). "Animal companions have been cited as providing important social support and representing social objects that require care by others" (Bryant, 1990). Animals have a tendency to lower heart rate and blood pressure, which moderate stress, in their owners (Jalongo, et al, 2004); this makes their owners more healthy and others in their presence more comfortable.

Jalongo, et al found, in their study of therapy dogs in classrooms and hospitals, that animals can "show great promise for motivating children to complete academic activities, not



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only in reading but also across the curriculum” (2004). Animals “offer a unique form of support to children’s learning, physical health, and emotional well-being” (Jalongo, et al, 2004). In their conclusion, they make note of the human-animal bond and its effect on children. Jalongo, et al state that children are fascinated and captivated by animals; they support this statement by pointing out that “animals predominate in the dreams, wishes, fantasies, drawing, and writings of children” (2004). Animals are a “surprisingly powerful, positive force on children’s...academic achievement” (Jalongo, et al, 2004).

### **Methods**

To obtain the required data, 16-question surveys were given in the three Fayetteville Public Schools middle schools in the Fayetteville, Arkansas School District. Fourteen survey questions covered doing well/better in school, getting homework done, getting assignments in on time, getting better grades, making friend more easily, being involved in extracurricular activities, being willing to learn English, making progress in English, handling bullying, preventing stress, learning more easily, enjoying school/learning, and feeling smart. The information was collected in their classrooms, an environment with which the students were already familiar. The surveys were accessed through Qualtrics and administered on Chromebooks. Twenty-two students were surveyed.

### **Data Collection**

To collect data, initial contact was made with the three middle school principals. Once the principals gave their approval, the ESL teachers for the schools were contacted. With either the teachers or the principals, a suitable time and day was arranged for the fourteen-question survey to be given. ESL teachers only meet with “direct” students, although they have “indirect” students as well, whom they do not see every day. Because middle school students are minors,

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consent forms were sent home with direct students for parent and student to sign and return to school. Considering some parents of ESL students do not speak English, the consent form was offered in Spanish as well. Participants were chosen based on those who returned a signed form. Within that subset, both students who have pets and those who do not proceeded with the survey. Students who do not have a pet were instructed to take the survey hypothetically as if they had a pet at home or still had a pet they used to own.

Surveys were administered in the classrooms because it is a location with which the students are already familiar. It also helped to contextualize the survey so that students were answering questions related to school while in their school environment. Surveys were administered in October of 2017. The students all have Chromebooks as part of their public schooling and took the survey via a link. The three ESL teachers were given no instruction during the survey. This allowed for further consistency within the classroom environment. Teachers who have a more involved teaching style, took part in explaining the survey. Those with a more laissez-faire teaching style allowed the students to work more independently. Therefore, students had consistency within their classrooms, though not necessarily between classrooms. Some questions were verbally reworded to ensure students understanding. At the first school, all the students were surveyed at once, working through the online survey at their own pace; the computer read the questions aloud. At the second school, the ESL students were surveyed class-by-class, each class taking the survey at the same pace, the researcher reading the questions aloud. In the third school, the survey was given by the ESL teacher. All results were recorded in Qualtrics.

Using the survey, all students answered the same questions in the same order. This fourteen-question survey was constructed by adapting questions from previous Harvard

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Immigration Project research (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). Topics applicable to middle school education were taken and reworded to be asked in terms of pet ownership. The ratio of academic to social to emotional was kept largely the same, creating an emphasis on academic. This allowed for the study to focus on this area, while having the social and emotional controls. The students were told to ask if they did not understand a word or question, and the researcher answered and explained as needed. By the methods described, the survey administration was as uniform and nonbiased as possible. See appendix 1 to view the survey.

### **Data Analysis**

Data obtained in this study was exported from Qualtrics into Microsoft Excel via CSV. Graphs were also generated by Qualtrics. Percentages and number of student responses were recorded in Excel and categorized into the five response groups: strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, and strongly disagree. The data was then split between students with pets and those without; 17 students owned pets, and 5 did not.

### **Participants**

Fayetteville, Arkansas has a relatively small ESL population, so any student who returned their consent form was asked to participate in the survey, regardless of pet ownership. The ESL teacher sees the students every day, so the teacher was relied on to send consent forms home with their students. In the Fayetteville, Arkansas school district, middle schools consist of fifth and sixth grades. These middle school, ESL students consisted of Mexican, Chinese, Indian, Saudi Arabian, Iraqi, Marshallese, Puerto Rican, Bahamian origins, representing five distinct first languages. The pets represented in this study included dogs, chickens, a cat, a rabbit, and a fish. A total of 22 students participated in the survey.

**Findings**

The survey questions focused on three aspects of school: academic, social, and emotional. Data analysis showed there was little consensus among the questions pertaining to the academic aspect of school. Student responses began to consolidate into agreement among the social questions, but the questions about the emotional aspect of school had the most unanimous responses. By splitting the data into students with pets and those without, the researcher was able to find majority opinions in both groups of students.

Table 1 shows the majority of students who own pets, 7 at 41.18%, neither agree nor disagree that pets help them to do better in school. Total agreement, when combining somewhat and strongly was 47.06%, while disagreement was only 11.76%. There were 2 students who do not own pets, 40%, who strongly agreed. An additional 20% somewhat agreed, causing a 60/40 split between agreement and disagreement.

Table 1

*Pet Owners' and Non-Pet Owners' Responses to "I do better in school than I would if I didn't have my pet."*

Response	with pet %	with pet <i>f</i>	without pet %	without pet <i>f</i>
Strongly agree	29.41%	5	40.00%	2
Somewhat agree	17.65%	3	20.00%	1
Neither agree nor disagree	41.18%	7	0.00%	0
Somewhat disagree	0.00%	0	20.00%	1
Strongly disagree	11.76%	2	20.00%	1

For the likelihood of getting homework done, the students with pets were split between somewhat agree and neither agree nor disagree that a pet relationship was helpful, with each category having 5 students and 29.41%. The remaining students were split almost evenly between strongly agree and disagreement. Of the students without pets, 4 of the 5 disagreed

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either somewhat or strongly, making up 80% of the responses. The remaining 20% neither agreed nor disagreed. These results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*Pet Owners' and Non-Pet Owners' Responses to "I'm more likely to get my homework done because of the relationship I have with my pet."*

Response	with pet %	with pet <i>f</i>	without pet %	without pet <i>f</i>
Strongly agree	17.65%	3	0.00%	0
Somewhat agree	29.41%	5	0.00%	0
Neither agree nor disagree	29.41%	5	20.00%	1
Somewhat disagree	5.88%	1	40.00%	2
Strongly disagree	17.65%	3	40.00%	2

Students thought pets do not have much of an effect on getting assignments in on time, as shown in Table 3. Six students who have pets, 35.29%, said they neither agreed nor disagreed that their pet makes punctual assignments easier. The others were split almost evenly between agreement and disagreement. Students who do not have pets strongly disagreed, representing 60%. The other 40% only somewhat agreed.

Table 3

*Pet Owners' and Non-Pet Owners' Responses to "My pet makes it easier for me to get most of my assignments in on time."*

Response	with pet %	with pet <i>f</i>	without pet %	without pet <i>f</i>
Strongly agree	17.65%	3	0.00%	0
Somewhat agree	11.76%	2	40.00%	2
Neither agree nor disagree	35.29%	6	0.00%	0
Somewhat disagree	29.41%	5	0.00%	0
Strongly disagree	5.88%	1	60.00%	3

Students both strongly agreed and neither agreed nor disagreed that they get better grades because they have a pet. There were 4 students, 23.53%, in each category. The remaining pet-owning students were split evenly between somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, and strongly

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disagree. Students who do not own pets were split 60/40 between strongly disagree and strongly agree, respectively, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

*Pet Owners' and Non-Pet Owners' Responses to "I get better grades because I have my pet."*

Response	with pet %	with pet <i>f</i>	without pet %	without pet <i>f</i>
Strongly agree	23.53%	4	40.00%	2
Somewhat agree	17.65%	3	0.00%	0
Neither agree nor disagree	23.53%	4	0.00%	0
Somewhat disagree	17.65%	3	0.00%	0
Strongly disagree	17.65%	3	60.00%	3

The majority of students who own pets, 35.29%, strongly agreed their pet makes making friends easier. Overall, there was a 65/35 split between agreement and disagreement, respectively. The students who do not own pets were split between somewhat disagree and strongly disagree. These students, 80%, do not think pets make making friends easier. There was, however, 20% that strongly agreed, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

*Pet Owners' and Non-Pet Owners' Responses to "I make friends easier because of my pet."*

Response	with pet %	with pet <i>f</i>	without pet %	without pet <i>f</i>
Strongly agree	35.29%	6	20.00%	1
Somewhat agree	29.41%	5	0.00%	0
Neither agree nor disagree	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Somewhat disagree	29.41%	5	40.00%	2
Strongly disagree	5.88%	1	40.00%	2

Table 6 shows that when asked if pets make involvement in extracurricular activities easier, most students who own pets, 47.06%, were split between strongly agree and strongly disagree. The remaining students were evenly distributed among somewhat agree, neither agree

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nor disagree, and somewhat disagree. A similar split is seen in students who do not own pets. The majority, 40% each, were split between strongly agree and somewhat disagree.

Table 6

*Pet Owners' and Non-Pet Owners' Responses to "My pet makes it easier for me to be involved in extracurricular activities."*

Response	with pet %	with pet <i>f</i>	without pet %	without pet <i>f</i>
Strongly agree	23.53%	4	40.00%	2
Somewhat agree	17.65%	3	0.00%	0
Neither agree nor disagree	17.65%	3	0.00%	0
Somewhat disagree	17.65%	3	40.00%	2
Strongly disagree	23.53%	4	20.00%	1

The majority of students who own pets, 7 students at 41.18%, strongly disagreed that they are more willing to learn English due to a pet. The majority of students who do not own pets, 3 students at 60%, also strongly disagreed. These results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7

*Pet Owners' and Non-Pet Owners' Responses to "I'm more willing to learn English because of my pet."*

Response	with pet %	with pet <i>f</i>	without pet %	without pet <i>f</i>
Strongly agree	11.76%	2	0.00%	0
Somewhat agree	17.65%	3	20.00%	1
Neither agree nor disagree	11.76%	2	0.00%	0
Somewhat disagree	17.65%	3	20.00%	1
Strongly disagree	41.18%	7	60.00%	3

Progress made in English was largely unaffected by pets. Most students who own pets, 29.41%, said they neither agreed nor disagreed that they have made more progress in English because of a pet. The remaining students were split evenly between agreement and disagreement. Of those who do not own pets, 2 students strongly disagreed pets have helped with English

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progress, but there is 1 student in each of the strongly agree, somewhat agree, and neither agree nor disagree categories, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8

*Pet Owners' and Non-Pet Owners' Responses to "I feel I've made more progress in English than I would have if I didn't have my pet."*

Response	with pet %	with pet <i>f</i>	without pet %	without pet <i>f</i>
Strongly agree	23.53%	4	20.00%	1
Somewhat agree	11.76%	2	20.00%	1
Neither agree nor disagree	29.41%	5	20.00%	1
Somewhat disagree	23.53%	4	0.00%	0
Strongly disagree	11.76%	2	40.00%	2

A high 64.71% of students strongly agreed that when other kids are not nice to them, they handle it better because of their pet. Of those students who own pets, over 70% agreed either somewhat or strongly, with only 3 students disagreeing. Students who do not own pets showed similar results. The majority strongly agreed, while the remaining students were dispersed evenly among somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, and strongly disagree, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9

*Pet Owners' and Non-Pet Owners' Responses to "When other kids aren't nice to me, I handle it better because of the bond I have with my pet."*

Response	with pet %	with pet <i>f</i>	without pet %	without pet <i>f</i>
Strongly agree	64.71%	11	40.00%	2
Somewhat agree	5.88%	1	20.00%	1
Neither agree nor disagree	11.76%	2	20.00%	1
Somewhat disagree	0.00%	0	0.00%	0
Strongly disagree	17.65%	3	20.00%	1

Most of the students who have pets, 52.94%, strongly agreed their pet keeps them from feeling so overwhelmed by a lot of school work. Only about 23.53% disagreed. Of the students



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who do not own pets, there was split between strongly agree and strongly disagree, with 40% in each category. The remaining 20% somewhat agreed, as shown in Table 10.

Table 10

*Pet Owners' and Non-Pet Owners' Responses to "My pet keeps me from feeling so overwhelmed when I have a lot of school work."*

Response	with pet %	with pet <i>f</i>	without pet %	without pet <i>f</i>
Strongly agree	52.94%	9	40.00%	2
Somewhat agree	5.88%	1	20.00%	1
Neither agree nor disagree	17.65%	3	0.00%	0
Somewhat disagree	17.65%	3	0.00%	0
Strongly disagree	5.88%	1	40.00%	2

Most of the students with pets, 5 students at 29.41%, strongly disagreed that pets make it easier for them to learn. The remaining 12 students were scattered pretty evenly among the other categories. There was more of a consensus among students who do not own pets. The majority, 60%, responded with somewhat disagree, and the other two students were split between strongly agree and strongly disagree. These results are shown in Table 11.

Table 11

*Pet Owners' and Non-Pet Owners' Responses to "My pet makes it easier for me to learn."*

Response	with pet %	with pet <i>f</i>	without pet %	without pet <i>f</i>
Strongly agree	17.65%	3	20.00%	1
Somewhat agree	17.65%	3	0.00%	0
Neither agree nor disagree	23.53%	4	0.00%	0
Somewhat disagree	11.76%	2	60.00%	3
Strongly disagree	29.41%	5	20.00%	1

Most students who own pets, 35.29%, somewhat agreed that pets increase their joy of learning/school. Additionally, 29.41% strongly agreed, so a total of 64.71% agreed. Students

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without pets mostly disagreed, 40% strongly and 20% somewhat. The remaining 40% were split between somewhat agree and neither agree or disagree, as shown in Table 12.

Table 12

*Pet Owners' and Non-Pet Owners' Responses to "I enjoy learning/school more because of my pet."*

Response	with pet %	with pet <i>f</i>	without pet %	without pet <i>f</i>
Strongly agree	29.41%	5	0.00%	0
Somewhat agree	35.29%	6	20.00%	1
Neither agree nor disagree	17.65%	3	20.00%	1
Somewhat disagree	5.88%	1	40.00%	2
Strongly disagree	11.76%	2	20.00%	1

When students with pets were asked if pets make them feel smart, 47.06% agreed, 23.53% strongly and 23.53% somewhat. By contrast, 35.29% disagreed. Different results were seen among students who do not own pets. All of them disagreed, 40% somewhat and 60% strongly. These results are shown in Table 13.

Table 13

*Pet Owners' and Non-Pet Owners' Responses to "My pet makes me feel smart."*

Response	with pet %	with pet <i>f</i>	without pet %	without pet <i>f</i>
Strongly agree	23.53%	4	0.00%	0
Somewhat agree	23.53%	4	0.00%	0
Neither agree nor disagree	17.65%	3	0.00%	0
Somewhat disagree	11.76%	2	40.00%	2
Strongly disagree	23.53%	4	60.00%	3

Students with pets mostly agreed pets increase their desire to succeed in school, though the largest category was neither agree nor disagree at 35.29%. Agreement totaled 52.94%, while disagreement was only 11.76%. Students who do not own pets also agreed, 40% strongly and 20% somewhat. Combined disagreement totaled 20%, as shown in Table 14.

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Table 14

*Pet Owners' and Non-Pet Owners' Responses to "I want to do well in school because of my pet."*

Response	with pet %	with pet <i>f</i>	without pet %	without pet <i>f</i>
Strongly agree	29.41%	5	40.00%	2
Somewhat agree	23.53%	4	20.00%	1
Neither agree nor disagree	35.29%	6	20.00%	1
Somewhat disagree	5.88%	1	0.00%	0
Strongly disagree	5.88%	1	20.00%	1

**Conclusions**

The primary question for this study was do ESL students feel pets aid in their academic success. Based on the data, ESL students do not think pets are helpful in terms of the academic aspect of school. Questions that were school-related included topics like achievement, homework, timely assignments, grades, English willingness, English progress, ease of learning, enjoying school/learning, feeling smart, and doing well.

For the 10 questions with these topics, there were 16 unanimous responses, 7 for students with pets and 9 for students without, out of a possible 20 (10 questions with 2 majorities each: pet owners and non-pet owners). For those who own pets, the responses were 0 for strongly agree, 1 for somewhat agree, 4 for neither agree nor disagree, 0 for somewhat disagree, and 2 for strongly disagree that pets help with academics. The largest of these categories, 4 students, was neither agree nor disagree. Total agreement was 1, and total disagreement was 2. Of the 9 unanimous responses among students without pets, there were 2 for strongly agree, 0 for somewhat agree, 0 for neither agree nor disagree, 2 for somewhat disagree, and 5 for strongly disagree. The largest of these categories, 5 students, was strongly disagree. Total agreement was 2, and total disagreement was 7. Overall, students with pets think their academic work is unaffected by pets. Students without pets believe pets do not help.

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There were 2 questions dealing with the social aspect of school. These include making friends and involvement in extracurricular activities. There was 1 unanimous response out of a possible 4 (2 questions with 2 majorities each: pet owners and non-pet owners), and it was pet owners who strongly agreed that pets help them make friends. Of the responses with a split majority, there were 2 for strongly agree, 2 for somewhat disagree, and 2 for strongly disagree. These results show that ESL students think pets are moderately more helpful to them with the social aspect of school than the academic aspect. The remaining 2 questions, about the emotional aspect of school, had the most unanimous agreement. There were 3 unanimous responses out of a possible 4 (2 questions with 2 majorities each: pet owners and non-pet owners), all for strongly agree. Pet-owning and non-pet-owning students alike strongly agreed pets help them handle being bullied. Pet owners also strongly agreed that pets keep them from feeling overwhelmed with school work, while non-pet owners were split between strongly agree and strongly disagree. In this study, pets were found to be perceived as more helpful with the emotional aspect of school than the social or academic aspects. The results of the social-based and emotional-based questions largely uphold previous literature that says pets are helpful to their owners' mental and emotional health (Poresky & Hendrix, 1990; Jalongo, et al, 2004).

Between students who have pets and those who do not, it seems having a pet in the home is perceived to be more beneficial than not having one. There were 2 questions, out of 14, on which students with pets and students without pets agreed, leaving 12 with differing responses. Of those 12 questions, there were 8 on which students with pets responded more positively and only 4 on which students without pets responded more positively.

Two considerations for these results are anti-pet cultures and the subset of students who returned consent forms. In a study that focuses on the ESL population, many cultures and

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religions are represented. There are religious barriers to owning pets, such as religions that see pets as unclean (Waldau & Patton, 2009). Taking this factor into consideration suggests that pets may not be helpful in the academic success of ESL students. Additionally, the subset of ESL students the researcher could sample were the students who returned consent forms. This may have affected this data as these are assumed to be the diligent students who have parental involvement in their schooling.

### **Recommendations**

The results from this study depict the ESL students' opinion of a pet's helpfulness. More quantitative studies should be conducted to see if their opinions are accurate. Similar studies could also be conducted in different age groups to see if being younger or being older and/or solely responsible for a pet changes a student's opinion. Parent perspective of pet ownership could also be included. Additionally, more long-term research could be conducted to investigate a link between pet ownership and the high school graduation rate of ESL students, building on Hauseman's 2015 research. Any additional research should strive to include more students for more data.

In future studies with middle school students, an incentive may be given to encourage students to participate. This could apply both to returning consent forms and to compensating the students for their survey participation. Getting consent forms home with students, signed by a parent, and back to school was a limiting factor in participation and data collection.

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## Appendix 1

### The Effect of Pet Ownership on ESL Students' U.S. Academic Success survey

I do better in school than I would if I didn't have my pet.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

I'm more likely to get my homework done because of the relationship I have with my pet.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

My pet makes it easier for me to get most of my assignments in on time.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

I get better grades because I have my pet.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

I make friends easier because of my pet.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

My pet makes it easier for me to be involved in extracurricular activities.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

I'm more willing to learn English because of my pet.

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- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

I feel I've made more progress in English than I would have if I didn't have my pet.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

When other kids aren't nice to me, I handle it better because of the bond I have with my pet.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

My pet keeps me from feeling so overwhelmed when I have a lot of school work.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

My pet makes it easier for me to learn.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

I enjoy learning/school more because of my pet.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

My pet makes me feel smart.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree



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- Strongly disagree

I want to do well in school because of my pet.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

What kind of animal is your pet?

Where is your family from?