



Strengthening Student Well-Being through CASEL-Based Social and Emotional Learning

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Abstract

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Social and Emotional Learning based on the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning framework has emerged as a strategic educational approach designed to develop students' emotional intelligence, interpersonal competence, and academic success. SEL focuses on five interconnected core domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. This study aims to examine the role and challenges of implementing in Indonesian elementary schools in fostering students' psychosocial well-being and academic outcomes. Employing a qualitative method through comprehensive library research, this study analyzes a wide range of scholarly articles and reports from various educational contexts. The results reveal that SEL significantly enhances students' empathy, emotional regulation, positive behavior, and learning engagement, which collectively contribute to better academic performance. However, challenges remain concerning teacher readiness, limited professional training, curriculum integration, and insufficient policy support. Therefore, active collaboration among schools, families, and communities is crucial to ensure the effective, sustainable, and culturally responsive implementation.



1. Introduction

Education in the 21st century not only demands the mastery of academic abilities but also social and emotional competencies that serve as the foundation for students' success in real life. Within this framework, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) based on the CASEL model (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) is an essential approach to support both the personal and social development of students (Shek et al., 2019). CASEL defines SEL as the process through which individuals acquire and apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills to understand and manage emotions, set positive goals, show empathy, establish healthy relationships, and make responsible decisions.

In Indonesia, the implementation of SEL is still in the early stages, although its urgency is increasingly recognized in the world of primary education. Along with the increasing complexity of children's social and emotional challenges in the digital age, the role of schools is no longer limited to an instructional institution but also as an environment that fosters the psychosocial well-being of students. According to Mahoney et al. (2018), the systematic implementation of SEL is proven to be able to increase students' academic results up to 11 percent higher compared to those who do not receive social-emotional intervention. Therefore, education that only emphasizes cognitive aspects without considering emotional development has the potential to produce a generation that is intellectually smart but socially and psychologically vulnerable.

The conceptual framework of CASEL-based SEL covers five main, interconnected domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness,

relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Hurley et al., 2018). These five competencies not only support academic achievement but also strengthen mental health, emotional regulation abilities, and students' adaptive capacity in facing dynamic social changes. At the elementary school level, mastery of these competencies has high significance because this period is crucial for the formation of a child's character, empathy, and prosocial behavior (Oberle et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, the implementation of SEL in Indonesia faces various structural and cultural obstacles. The biggest challenge lies in the readiness of educators to understand and integrate the social-emotional approach into teaching and learning activities. Anggadwita et al. (2021) found that most teachers in Indonesia still focus solely on academic achievement and have not yet mastered SEL-oriented learning strategies. In addition to these limitations, the low availability of professional training opportunities, minimal institutional policy support, and the lack of available social-emotional assessment standards also contribute as inhibiting factors to the effectiveness of this program's implementation.

Furthermore, environmental factors and family involvement play a crucial role in determining the success of SEL implementation. Anisa et al. (2019) assert that emotional support from family and community significantly contributes to children's psychological stability and the effectiveness of school-based social-emotional interventions. Therefore, synergy between school, family, and community needs to be developed so that SEL implementation can be sustainable and consistent with prevailing social values.

In the global context, various studies indicate that planned SEL implementation can reduce problematic behavior, increase emotional well-being, and strengthen social relationships within the school environment (Cipriano & Rappolt-Schlichtmann, 2020). Meanwhile, in Indonesia, the urgency of implementing SEL is increasing along with the rise of phenomena like bullying, academic pressure, and mental health issues among students. This condition emphasizes the importance of developing educational policies and practices oriented towards students' social-emotional well-being. Therefore, this research aims to comprehensively analyze the role, impact, and challenges of CASEL-based SEL implementation in Indonesian elementary schools, while providing strategic recommendations for the development of a more holistic, humane, and sustainable education.

2. Methods

This study applies the library research method, focusing on the systematic analysis of various scientific literature relevant to the theme of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) based on the CASEL framework in elementary schools. This approach is used to trace and review theories, previous research findings, and implementation practices that have been applied in various educational contexts, both nationally and internationally. The main data sources come from articles in reputable international journals published within the last five years, accompanied by educational institution reports related to SEL policies and implementation in elementary schools.

The initial stage of the research involved literature selection using the Google Scholar database with keywords such as “social emotional learning,” “CASEL framework,” “elementary education,” and “emotional competence.” The obtained literature was then selected based on topic relevance and its contribution to theoretical and practical understanding of SEL. Subsequently, the selected articles were analyzed thematically to identify patterns, common research findings, and the challenges of implementing SEL in the primary education environment.

Data analysis in this study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, interpreting the content of the literature to build a comprehensive conceptual understanding of the relationship between social-emotional development, psychological well-being, and students’ academic achievement. This analysis process was carried out by grouping information into three main categories: (1) concepts and basic principles of CASEL-based SEL; (2) implementation strategies and social-emotional learning practices in elementary schools; and (3) challenges and supporting factors for successful implementation. To ensure the validity and credibility of the review results, the researcher applied the source triangulation technique by comparing data from various scientific publications, education policy reports, and empirical research findings across contexts. In this way, the research findings become more objective and representative of the condition of SEL application globally and in Indonesia. The results of the literature synthesis are then interpreted to provide a comprehensive picture of SEL’s contribution to improving emotional well-being and academic achievement of elementary school students.

The choice of the library research method is based on the consideration that this approach allows for in-depth theoretical exploration and provides space for critical analysis of various SEL models and implementation practices in the educational world. In addition to enriching the conceptual foundation, the results of this study are also expected to offer practical implications for teachers, policymakers, and primary education institutions in integrating social-emotional learning into the curriculum in a sustainable manner. Thus, this study not only contributes to the development of CASEL-based SEL theory but also strengthens the direction of Indonesian education towards more holistic, adaptive, and student well-being-oriented learning.

3. Results

The results of the literature review indicate that the implementation of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) based on the CASEL framework provides a significant impact on psychological well-being, academic achievement, and the formation of a positive school climate at the primary education level. In the global context, a meta-analysis conducted by Shek et al. (2019) showed that students participating in SEL programs experienced an increase in social skills, emotional skills, and academic achievement compared to the control group. These findings reinforce the view that the development of social and emotional abilities is an integral part of academic success, not a standalone aspect, as the two mutually reinforce in supporting the holistic development of students.

In Indonesia, efforts to apply SEL are beginning to be integrated into the curriculum through character education approaches and the strengthening of the Pancasila student profile. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this application still varies between schools, depending on the capacity of educators, the availability of facilities, and the level of understanding of the social-emotional concept itself (Sari & Setiawan, 2021). One major obstacle is the limitation of professional training for teachers in mastering the five core CASEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Hurley et al., 2018). Many educators still focus on academic achievement and cognitive assessment, so the formation of students' social-emotional competencies has not received balanced attention (Anggadwita et al., 2021).

SEL plays an important role in supporting students' emotional well-being. Research by Oberle et al. (2021) asserts that students with good emotional regulation skills tend to have lower stress levels, healthier social relationships, and positive attitudes towards the learning process. This is relevant to the context of primary education in Indonesia, where high academic pressure often reduces learning motivation and increases student anxiety. Through SEL, children can understand their feelings, develop empathy for others, and learn to manage conflict constructively. Besides impacting individuals, SEL also improves social cohesion in the school environment. The study by Mahoney et al. (2018) found that schools that implement SEL continuously experience a decrease in negative behavior such as bullying and aggression, and an increase in the sense of security and social involvement of students.

Thus, schools become a more supportive space for the emotional and academic development of children. This condition is very important at the elementary school level, as this phase is a crucial period for the formation of self-identity, character, and social values. The implementation of SEL is not only beneficial for students but also has a positive impact on teachers. According to Cejudo et al. (2020), teachers who receive social-emotional training show better psychological well-being and establish more positive interpersonal relationships with students. This shows that the success of SEL implementation depends on the readiness of educators as the main facilitators in building a safe learning environment that supports students' emotional growth.

Although the benefits are clear, various challenges still hinder the implementation of SEL in Indonesian elementary schools. First, the limited understanding of teachers regarding the main concepts of SEL. Many teachers have not received formal training, so SEL implementation is often done intuitively and without structure. Second, minimal institutional support and educational policies. The SEL program is often considered an additional activity, not an integral part of the learning process. Consequently, the implementation time and budget allocation are still very limited. In addition to structural factors, cultural challenges also influence the effectiveness of SEL implementation in Indonesia. In a society that tends to be collectivistic, the expression of emotion is often considered a form of weakness or inappropriate behavior, so children are not accustomed to expressing their feelings openly (Westby, 2022).

This condition hinders the development of self-awareness and emotional management abilities. Therefore, the adaptation of the SEL program needs to be adjusted to the local cultural context to be more acceptable to the school community. Apart from the emotional and social aspects, SEL is also proven to contribute to the indirect increase in academic ability through the strengthening of intrinsic motivation and self-control. Research by Anisa et al. (2019) showed that students with high social-emotional skills have better abilities in setting learning goals and facing academic obstacles. They also show higher levels of attendance and involvement in school activities. In Indonesia, the research results of Akhtar et al. (2020) show a positive relationship between emotional regulation abilities and the academic achievement of elementary school students. The role of the family is an important factor in the success of SEL implementation. Smith et al. (2020) assert that collaboration between schools and families strengthens the effectiveness of social-emotional programs because the values instilled in school can be reinforced at home. In the Indonesian context, this collaboration can be realized through active communication between teachers and parents and their involvement in character-based learning activities.

From the policy side, the implementation of SEL requires clear and measurable regulatory support. The Indonesian Government through the Merdeka Curriculum has begun to integrate social-emotional aspects in the Pancasila student profile, which includes the dimensions of independence, mutual cooperation and noble character . However, according to Hakam (2018), its implementation is still normative because it does not yet have clear operational guidelines at the elementary

school level. Therefore, there is a need for technical policies and an evaluation system that allows for objective measurement of students' social-emotional competency achievement. The utilization of educational technology also opens new opportunities for strengthening SEL. Digital platforms can help teachers assess students' social-emotional aspects and provide personalized feedback. Bonesso et al. (2020) stated that social-emotional learning-based applications are able to increase students' self-awareness and empathy through interactive simulations and self-reflection. However, its implementation in Indonesia still faces obstacles related to technology access and the level of digital literacy among teachers and students. The review results indicate that CASEL-based SEL implementation has high relevance in improving the emotional well-being and academic achievement of primary school students.

To achieve optimal results, a comprehensive and collaborative approach involving all stakeholders including teachers, principals, parents, and policymakers is needed. An adaptive curriculum, continuous teacher training, and an inclusive school culture are important foundations for the successful implementation of SEL. The long-term success of SEL also highly depends on the school's ability to build an ecosystem that supports students' mental health. A safe, empathetic, and collaborative learning environment provides space for children to express emotions and develop their potential optimally (Calp, 2020). Thus, SEL implementation not only contributes to an increase in learning achievement but also forms a generation that is characterized, resilient, and caring towards others. SEL is ultimately not just a

pedagogical innovation, but an essential social investment for the future of Indonesian education.

4. Conclusion

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) based on CASEL is proven to be a strategic approach to improve the emotional well-being and academic outcomes of elementary school students in Indonesia. The five main CASEL domains self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making provide a foundation for the development of children's character and emotional intelligence. The review results indicate that SEL strengthens learning motivation, reduces negative behavior, and creates a positive school climate.

However, the success of its implementation depends on teacher readiness, policy support, and collaboration between schools, families, and the community. The main challenges lie in the lack of teacher training and limited operational guidance. Therefore, SEL integration needs to be carried out systemically through continuous training, strengthening curriculum policies, and utilizing learning technology. With a comprehensive approach, SEL can become an important foundation for building the character and psychosocial well-being of Indonesian children in facing future challenges.

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