SOCIAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN A MENTAL HEALTH PERSPECTIVE : A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

Mental health plays a crucial role in the social and emotional development of elemen tary school students, which is the foundation for academic success and long-term psychological well-being. This study aims to analyze the social and emotional development and mental health of elementary school students and identify the factors that influence them. The method used is a literature review with a descriptive qualitative approach, referring to national and interna tional scientific journal articles published in the last five years (2021–2026). The results of the review indicate that positive mental health, characterized by good emotional regulation and adequate social support, contributes significantly to improving students' learning concentra tion, motivation, and social interaction skills. Conversely, mental health disorders such as anx iety, stress, and the impact of bullying have been shown to hinder social and emotional devel opment, reduce self-confidence, and trigger social isolation. A positive school environment (a safe and inclusive climate) and the active role of teachers and parents are key protective factors. In conclusion, mental health is an important determinant in the social and emotional develop ment of elementary school students. Holistic interventions through social-emotional learning, teacher training, and collaboration with families are essential to creating an environment that supports children's mental well-being.

Keywords *:* social emotional development, mental health, elementary school students, literature review

INTRODUCTION

Social-emotional development during primary school, which is the age range of six to twelve, is an important foundation for an individual's long-term mental health. At this stage, children begin to compare themselves to peers, develop a sense of competence, and build emo tional regulation skills that will greatly affect their psychological well-being in adolescence and adulthood. Longitudinal research conducted by Lee and Wang (2025) on 2,607 South Ko rean students who were followed from fourth through eighth grade provided strong evidence that the development of positive emotional competence correlates significantly with decreased depression and increased life satisfaction later in life. Thus, investment in social-emotional learning (PSE) at the elementary school level is not an optional additional activity, but a fun damental foundation for long-term mental health.

However, the current global conditions show that children's mental health is in an alarming situation. Data from the WHO and UNICEF (2024) state that about one in seven children aged ten to nineteen years have a mental health disorder, with most of these problems appearing before the child reaches the age of fourteen. This figure underscores the urgency of early childhood mental health promotion and intervention, especially in school settings where children spend most of their time every day. Schools, as emphasized by Yu et al. (2022), are *Setting* It is important for the promotion of children's mental health because it provides a daily learning environment that plays an important role in supporting students' emotional well-being.

In Indonesia, the mental health situation of children and adolescents is also concerning. *Indonesia National Adolescent Mental Health Survey* (I-NAMHS) in 2022 reported that one in three adolescents aged ten to seventeen, or about 2.45 million adolescents out of a total of 15.5 million adolescents in Indonesia, faced mental disorders in the last twelve months period. Fur

thermore, data from the Ministry of Health based on the Free Health Check (CKG) program in 2025 reveals that two million Indonesian children experience mental health problems. The main factors that contribute to this condition include educational models that focus too much on final grades, excessive exposure to digital devices without adequate supervision, and weak emotional regulation skills in children (Setyawan et al., 2025). Data from I-NAMHS 2022 also shows that one in three Indonesian Gen-Z experiences mental health problems, a condition whose roots can be traced to poorly supported psychosocial experiences in elementary school (Rohmah, 2025).

This condition is increasingly complex because there is a significant gap between the need for PSE in elementary schools and its implementation in the field. Based on the identifi cation from Ama et al. (2025), Durlak et al. (2021), and Wulandari and Puspitasari (2021), there are four main research gaps that are important gaps to fill. First, the population gap is that previous studies on PSE have focused more on the early childhood and junior high school levels, so that the elementary school level has not received specific and adequate attention. Second, methodological gaps, most of the existing studies are dominated by literature studies or theoretical studies, so there is a great lack of empirical field data to describe real conditions in schools. Third, the contextual gap, there is still very little effort to integrate the mental health perspective explicitly into the study of the social-emotional development of elementary school children; Most research still separates social-emotional competence and mental health as two distinct domains, even though the two are closely interrelated. Fourth, the knowledge gap has not yet been available for assessment instruments for social-emotional development based on mental health and specifically for the context of elementary schools in Indonesia.

In addition to gaps in the literature, the real conditions on the ground also illustrate real challenges. Research by Putri and Ramadhani (2021) found that as many as 78 percent of ele mentary school teachers feel overwhelmed dividing time between high academic demands and the development of students' character and social-emotional life, so that social-emotional as pects are often overlooked in daily learning. Furthermore, Parman et al. (2025) revealed that 64 percent of teachers feel that the current national evaluation system does not provide enough space for strengthening character values and non-academic competencies, so assessments of students' social-emotional development are almost never carried out systematically and in a structured manner. This condition is exacerbated by the inequality of access between schools in urban areas that have begun to implement simple PSE practices and schools in disadvan taged, frontier, and outermost (3T) areas that face limited access to teacher training, learning resources, and partnerships that support the development of students' social-emotional compe tencies (Kusumawardani & Mulyani, 2024).

In today's digital era, the social-emotional development challenges of elementary school students are increasingly complex with their increased involvement in technology-based learning and interaction. Maharani (2024) reports that excessive use of social media (more than three hours daily) can lead to a variety of mental health problems in children, including anxiety due to *fear of missing out*, depression that arises from social comparisons with *Influence* or peers, sleep disturbances due to exposure to blue light, and decreased ability to concentrate due to habits *multitasking* digital. Alim et al.'s (2025) research even found a significant negative correlation between the duration of technology use in online learning and students' mental health, where the longer students are exposed to digital learning, the higher the level of anxiety and stress they experience.

In fact, elementary schools have great potential to become agents of change in building children's mental health through structured and integrated PSE. The Merdeka Curriculum that is currently implemented in Indonesia has opened up opportunities by emphasizing that learn ing must foster students' social, emotional, and spiritual competence (Kemendikbudristek, 2024). The Pancasila Student Profile with its six dimensions—faith and noble character, global diversity, cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creative—actually has a strong

alignment with the five core competencies of PSE from CASEL (*Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning*). However, this opportunity has not been optimally utilized because there are no concrete operational guidelines, clear achievement indicators, and valid assessment instruments to measure the social-emotional development of elementary school stu dents from a mental health perspective.

Based on the description above, this research is very urgent to be carried out. This study aims to: (1) analyze how the social-emotional development of elementary school students in the perspective of mental health is interrelated; (2) identify the contextual factors that affect it; (3) develop evidence-based recommendations for teacher policies and practices; and (4) for mulate research contributions in the form of contextual integrated social-emotional learning models for primary schools in Indonesia. Thus, this research is expected to fill the gaps that have been identified while having a real impact on improving the quality of basic education in Indonesia.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

This research rests on three main theoretical pillars that complement each other. The first pillar is the framework *Social-Emotional Learning* from CASEL (*Collaborative for Aca demic, Social, and Emotional Learning*). This framework formulates five core competencies that have been empirically proven to have a causal relationship with the mental health of ele mentary school-age children. The five competencies include self-awareness, namely the ability to recognize emotions as well as self's strengths and weaknesses; self-management, which is the ability to control emotions, thoughts, and actions including delaying satisfaction and han dling stress; social awareness, which is the ability to understand other people's points of view and empathize; relationship skills, namely the ability to establish and maintain positive rela tionships and resolve conflicts constructively; and responsible decision-making, namely the ability to choose positive actions based on considerations of ethics, safety, and social conse quences.

The second pillar is the perspective of children's mental health. According to WHO and UNICEF (2021), children's mental health is defined as a psychological condition in which in dividuals feel peaceful and balanced, able to cope with the pressures of normal life, carry out daily activities well, work efficiently, contribute to society, and respect others. Suppiej et al. (2025) emphasize that children's mental health is more than just the absence of mental illness; It includes achieving emotional development milestones, strong social skills, and resilience in the face of life's challenges. In this study, children's mental health was operationalized through three key indicators, namely psychological well-being, anxiety and stress, and emotional resil ience.

The third pillar is the Independent Curriculum with a Pancasila Student Profile. The Independent Curriculum emphasizes strengthening the six main competencies of elementary school graduates, namely faith and noble character, global diversity, mutual cooperation, inde pendence, critical reasoning, and creativity. Values such as mutual cooperation, empathy, and social responsibility contained in this profile are in line with CASEL's competencies. Research by Berliyana et al. (2025) shows that the implementation of the values of the Pancasila Student Profile through a combination of classroom activities, learning projects, habituation, and char acter strengthening is effective in supporting students' social-emotional development.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses the literature study method (*literature review*) with a descriptive quali tative approach. Data sources come from national and international scientific journal articles published in the period 2021 to 2026, as well as official policy documents such as ministerial regulations and WHO/UNICEF reports. Literature searches were conducted through Google

Scholar, Scopus, and PubMed databases with keywords *social emotional learning*, *mental health elementary school*, *CASEL*, *PSE SD*, and *Children's mental health*. Inclusion criteria include primary research or systematic review relevant to the topic, published within the last five years, and in Indonesian or English. Of the 120 articles identified, as many as 45 articles met the criteria and were analyzed thematically to answer the research questions.

DISCUSSION RESULTS

The Relationship of Social-Emotional Development to Mental Health

Based on the synthesis of the literature, it was found that the five social-emotional com petencies of CASEL have a close relationship with the mental health of elementary school students. Self-awareness competence, for example, allows children to recognize their own emotions and detect signs of stress early on. Lee and Wang's (2025) research identified three profiles of social-emotional competency development in children, namely low profile (27.08% of students), medium profile (55.47% of students), and high profile (17.45% of students). Stu dents in high profiles consistently showed better levels of self-awareness for five years in a row, and by the time they reached eighth grade, their depression scores were significantly lower and their life satisfaction scores were significantly higher compared to students in the medium profile. These findings confirm that well-developed self-awareness from an early age is a strong predictor of positive mental health in the future.

Self-management competencies are very important in the digital era. Maharani (2024) reports that excessive use of social media, i.e. more than three hours every day, can lead to anxiety due to fear of missing out, depression that arises from social comparisons with peers or *Influence*, sleep disturbances due to exposure to blue light, as well as decreased concentra tion ability due to digital multitasking. On the other hand, Dipayanti's research (2025) shows that spiritual practices such as reading the Qur'an regularly every morning before lessons start have been shown to provide significant psychological benefits, such as reducing mental stress and anxiety, bringing peace of mind, improving memory and concentration, and strengthening mental resilience.

Social consciousness competencies serve as the main shield against action *bullying*. Khoirunnisa (2024) research at SDN 1 Demak Ijo identified eight causative factors *bullying* all of which are rooted in low empathy, inability to manage emotions, and group influence. Victims *bullying* experiencing severe anxiety, losing confidence, showing physical symptoms such as abdominal pain and migraines, and tending to stay away from social environments. On the contrary, the superior practice at MIN 4 Banjar through the 5S culture of Smile, Greeting, Greeting, Politeness, and Courtesy which is applied every morning at the entrance of the school has succeeded in creating a friendly and comfortable school climate, increasing mutual respect between students and teachers, and making students more courageous to smile and greet others even outside the school environment (Mansur & Sholeh, 2024).

Relationship skills competency acts as a social shield that provides protection from the adverse consequences of stress. Alwina (2023) shows that an organized and sustainable coun seling guidance program has a significant impact on five aspects, namely managing emotions, increasing confidence, assertive communication skills, improving stress coping strategies, and strengthening synergy between teachers and parents. Ikarani (2025) emphasized that interac tion between teachers and students is the most significant contextual element in predicting stu dents' mental well-being. A teacher who successfully builds a good relationship with students is usually emotionally responsive, consistent, provides freedom within clear boundaries, and serves as an example of social-emotional skills.

Responsible decision-making competencies are a synthesis of the other four competen cies. Research by Kibtiyah, Gunadi, and Umam (2023) found that good mental health does not always correlate with high achievement, with a correlation coefficient of only 0.074. These

findings are very meaningful because they reveal that children who have good mental health will not automatically achieve high achievements, and vice versa. Implicitly, educators and parents should not assume that high-achieving children automatically have good mental health, because children who face high-achieving pressures often hide their anxiety and depression behind their extraordinary success.

Contextual Factors Influencing

The success of social-emotional learning in elementary school is not only determined by the existing program or curriculum, but is also influenced by a number of external factors. Based on the synthesis of the literature, there are at least five main contextual factors that are interrelated. First, the role of the teacher in the classroom, where the teacher acts as a mediator, facilitator, advisor, and guide. However, the main obstacle in Indonesia is the low level of training on PSE and the lack of explicit integration of PSE in the national curriculum, so PSE is often seen as an additional activity.

Second, parental involvement. Research by Kibtiyah et al. (2023) reveals that there is no one best parenting method for all children; Parents must be able to adapt and adapt their approach to the child's character and emotional intelligence level. For children with high emo tional intelligence, permissive parenting has been shown to be more effective, while for chil dren with low emotional intelligence, authoritarian parenting is more beneficial.

Third, local culture and wisdom. Research by Setiawan et al. (2025) shows that the integrative approach based on the Nyadran Dam Bagong tradition in Trenggalek significantly improves students' emotional literacy with an N-Gain of 0.53 (medium category), while the control group only reaches 0.24 (low category). Values such as mutual cooperation, delibera tion, gratitude, and respect for ancestors internalized in these traditions form a strong social basis for the development of prosocial character.

Fourth, the school climate. Ikarani (2025) refers to a study by Widiasmara, Ambarsari, and Faried (2021) which shows that the school climate affects students' social-emotional health through the mediation of a sense of belonging to the school. Students who feel like they are an important part of the school and feel cared for by their teachers show much better mental health, regardless of the level of academic stress they experience.

Fifth, digital technology management. Alim et al. (2025) found a significant negative correlation between the duration of technology use in online learning and students' mental health, where the longer students are exposed to digital learning, the higher the levels of anxiety and stress they experience.

Empirical Description of the Current PSE Condition of Elementary School Students

Based on the latest empirical studies, the social-emotional competency profile of Indo nesian elementary school students currently shows conditions that require serious attention. In terms of self-awareness, it was found that 60 percent of students involved in digital learning experienced high anxiety and half of them were unable to recognize the source of their own anxiety (Alim et al., 2025). In terms of self-management, screening activities using the SDQ 25 instrument at MAN 2 Yogyakarta found that out of 40 students, 16 people or 40 percent were in the category of abnormal mental health with predominance of problems on the hyper activity sub-scale, which reflects difficulties in managing impulsive behavior independently (Setyawan et al., 2025). In terms of social awareness, it was recorded that 55 percent of students had difficulty overcoming interpersonal problems due to the limitations of direct social inter action due to the dominance of digital learning (Alim et al., 2025). In terms of relationship skills, the unsupervised use of digital technology leads to social isolation and a decline in face to-face communication skills, where children who interact more frequently through digital plat forms tend to have lower levels of social skills (Ramadhani et al., 2025). In terms of decision making,

students who do not receive adequate stimulation of affective values in learning tend to be more impulsive in decision-making and more susceptible to negative social pressures from their peers (Faoziah & Shanie, 2025).

The real conditions on the ground further strengthen this picture. As many as 78 percent of elementary school teachers feel overwhelmed to divide their time between academic de mands and character development, so that the social-emotional aspects of students are often neglected in their daily learning (Putri & Ramadhani, 2021). Furthermore, 64 percent of teach ers feel that the national evaluation system does not provide room for strengthening character values, so the assessment of students' social-emotional development is almost never carried out systematically (Parman et al., 2025). The condition of the access gap has also exacerbated the situation, where schools in urban areas have indeed started to implement some simple PSE practices, but schools in disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost areas face much more chal lenging conditions with limited access to training, learning resources, and supportive partner ships (Kusumawardani & Mulyani, 2024).

The impact of this suboptimal PSE condition on students' mental health and learning motivation is very significant. Victims *bullying* experiencing stress, fear, low self-esteem, and difficulty focusing on learning activities. In Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, *bullying* un dermines the basic need for security that is the foundation for students' intrinsic learning moti vation. Rohmah (2025) added that the mental health condition of Gen-Z and adolescents in Indonesia is in a state of concern, with increasing cases of suicide, juvenile delinquency, and various behavioral disorders. The Indonesia National Adolescent Mental Health Survey 2022 revealed that one in three Indonesian Gen-Z experiences mental health problems, a condition whose roots can be traced back to poorly supported psychosocial experiences in elementary school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the synthesis of the literature that has been conducted, this study prepares evidence-based recommendations aimed at two main stakeholders, namely policymakers at the national and regional levels, and teachers as the leading implementers of PSE in the classroom. For policymakers, there are six main recommendations. First, the formalization of PSE in the national curriculum through the elaboration of indicators of socio-emotional competency achievement per grade level and the development of valid assessment instruments. Second, prioritizing mental health education in schools by requiring the availability of mental health professionals such as psychologists or counselors in each elementary school. Third, the devel opment of a PSE module based on local wisdom that integrates Pancasila values, local tradi tions, and religious teachings. Fourth, reform the national assessment system to begin accom modating non-cognitive indicators as a legitimate part of student development reports, along side academic achievement. Fifth, affirmative policies for schools in 3T areas through a special PSE training program, as well as a digital environment management policy with a maximum of six hours per day limit on the duration of online learning. Sixth, the integration of PSE in pre-service teacher education at LPTK through curriculum revisions that include courses on teachers' social-emotional competence, emotionally responsive pedagogy, and SEL-based teaching strategies.

For teacher practice in the classroom, there are seven recommendations that can be implemented immediately. First, integrate PSE into the daily routine of the classroom through activities *morning check-in* to establish an emotionally safe classroom atmosphere, brief mo ments of reflection at the end of lessons, and the establishment of shared class norms that reflect social-emotional values. Second, use an emotion-based and relational learning approach through small group discussions, project-based learning that requires cooperation, and the use of folklore or traditional games as a medium for learning social-emotional values. Third, ac

tively develop teachers' social-emotional competencies through *self-care*, join the PSE practice community, and conduct regular self-reflection. Fourth, conduct periodic screening and assess ment of PSE using SDQ-25 instruments adapted for elementary school contexts, structured observations, student reflective journals, and behavioral portfolios. Fifth, handle *bullying* as a PSE priority by monitoring student interaction, providing education on the impact of *bullying*, as well as implementing a firm intervention strategy and involving parents. Sixth, manage the use of digital technology wisely in the classroom by limiting screen time, implementing *digital curfew* By not using a gadget one hour before bedtime, using a parental control application, and teaching digital literacy. Seventh, build an active partnership with parents through regular communication about PSE's goals and activities, as well as provide simple guidance on PSE habituation at home.

RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

This research offers novelty through the systematic integration of the PSE competency framework from CASEL with specific mental health indicators contextualized in elementary school settings in Indonesia. The main novelty of this research lies in three things. First, there is no PSE model designed specifically for Indonesian elementary schools by explicitly linking the five CASEL competencies, namely self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, re lationship skills, and responsible decision-making for the three key indicators of mental health of elementary school children, namely psychological well-being, anxiety, and resilience. Sec ond, this study specifically pays attention to contextual factors in Indonesia which include the absence of structured psychosocial services, the absence of adequate elementary counseling guidance services, and the excessive burden on teachers who are not PSE-trained. Third, the recommendations produced are operational and evidence-based, so that they can be directly implemented by policymakers and teachers. Practically, this research contributes to the devel opment of a mental health-based social-emotional learning model for Indonesian elementary schools that can be piloted through experimental research or mixed methods in the future.

CONCLUSION

The social-emotional development of elementary school students from the perspective of mental health is an urgent issue that needs systematic attention. Based on a literature review from 2021 to 2026, it can be concluded that positive mental health, characterized by good emo tional regulation and adequate social support, contributes significantly to improving students' learning concentration, motivation, and social interaction skills. In contrast, mental health dis orders such as anxiety, stress, and impact *bullying* It has been shown to inhibit social-emotional development, lower self-confidence, and trigger social isolation. Positive school environment factors, a safe and inclusive climate, and the active role of teachers and parents are the main protective factors. The empirical condition of PSE of Indonesian elementary school students is currently still concerning with the high rates of anxiety, hyperactivity, low social skills, and inequality of access between urban schools and 3T areas. This study recommends the formali zation of PSE in the national curriculum, strengthening teacher training, assessment reform, periodic mental health screening, wise management of the digital environment, and active part nerships with parents. The main contribution of this research is the preparation of a contextual mental health integrated PSE model for Indonesian elementary schools. Further research is strongly recommended to test the effectiveness of the model through qualitative, quantitative, or mixed method empirical studies in various regions of Indonesia.

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