



## Relationship Between Mental Health and Socio Emotional Learning of Students (Case Study at Poltekkes Kemenkes Makassar)

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### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received Desember 05, 2024

Approved Desember 30, 2024

#### Keywords:

Health, Mental, Socio  
Emotional Learning,  
Character

#### ABSTRACT

*This study aimed to explore the relationship between mental health and social-emotional learning of students at Makassar Poltekkes Kemenkes. The main focus of the study was to identify factors that influence the interaction between the two variables, by developing a data collection tool that included in-depth interviews. The findings showed that students with better levels of mental health tend to have higher social emotional skills, which contribute positively to their character development. The results of the qualitative analysis indicated that emotional support from the social environment, including family and educational institutions, is highly influential in strengthening mental well-being and social-emotional learning. The findings have profound significance in the context of health care, as they demonstrate the importance of integrating mental health approaches in character education programmes. The implications of this study encourage health education institutions to pay attention to mental health aspects as an integral part of curriculum development, which not only aims to improve academic competence, but also shape students' character to be more adaptive and resilient to face life's challenges.*

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**How to cite:** Syamsir, Natsir, M., Hasan, E., Wajdi, M., & Lutfi. (2024). Relationship Between Mental Health and Socio Emotional Learning of Students (Case Study at Poltekkes Kemenkes Makassar). *Jurnal Ilmiah Global Education*, 5(4), 3946-3952. <https://doi.org/10.55681/jige.v5i4.3635>

### INTRODUCTION

Character education for young people is an issue that has received increasing attention in the world of education, especially in this modern era, where challenges to mental health are increasingly complex. The relationship between mental health and Socio Emotional Learning (SEL) is a crucial aspect that needs to be analysed as both play an important role in shaping individual character and behaviour. SEL, which refers to an individual's ability to understand and manage emotions, interact with others positively, and make responsible decisions, is expected to be a tool to improve students' mental health. Through this study, the research conducted at Poltekkes Kemenkes Makassar aims to explore and analyse the interaction between mental health and SEL components in the context of higher education. In recent years the study of mental health and emotional learning has undergone significant development. Various studies

have shown that those who have an awareness of mental health tend to have better social skills, are able to adapt to the environment, and show more positive character. As stated by Durlak et al. (2011), effective SEL programmes can reduce negative behaviours and improve academic outcomes, suggesting a positive relationship between social skills and mental well-being. However, there is a lack of literature that specifically addresses how SEL programmes can be integrated to help students with mental health disorders, especially in higher education. In addition, previous research tends to focus more on students at the primary and secondary school levels, while the implementation of SEL in higher education is still under-researched.

By critically reviewing existing sources, this analysis will provide a strong foundation for future research, and hopefully make a positive contribution to efforts to improve character and mental health among young people. The development of the relationship between mental health and social emotional learning (SEL) in shaping young people's character has received increasing attention over the past few years. Early research suggests that good mental health strongly influences an individual's ability to interact socially and manage their emotions, which is at the core of SEL. According to (O. Kravchenko, 2021). Furthermore, in the last decade, research has highlighted the importance of SEL as a tool to support students' mental health. A study conducted by (Alex Gurn et al., 2021) states that SEL programmes integrated into the curriculum can produce significant positive impacts on the mental health of university students, reducing stress and anxiety levels. Other research shows that when individuals are equipped with social and emotional skills, they are better able to deal with the challenges faced in an educational context. Research conducted by Zins et al. (2004) highlighted the importance of emotional education at all levels of education, yet its application in the form of official programmes has received little attention among higher education institutions. This leaves a gap in our understanding of the relationship between mental health and character development among university students.

Several theoretical perspectives suggest that social and emotional skills can significantly affect an individual's mental health. According to emotional intelligence theory, the ability to understand and manage one's own and others' emotions can prevent mental health problems such as anxiety and depression among university students (O. Kravchenko, 2021; Alex Gurn et al., 2021). Research shows that effective SEL programmes can improve self-confidence and communication skills, which in turn can contribute to mental well-being (M. Royer, 2017; P. Beer et al., 2017). From a psychological developmental perspective, the ecological approach shows how social environments, such as family and community, can influence an individual's mental health and character. Thus, positive environmental support is crucial in the implementation of SEL programmes to strengthen youth resilience (K. Tomaszek, 2016; Kisha Bird, 2015). In addition, the social engagement model underlines the importance of collaboration between formal and non-formal education in building social and emotional skills that function in both academic and personal environments (Christensen et al., 2015; Seider et al., 2016). In contrast, some criticisms of SEL approaches arise from the view that an exclusive focus on emotional development may overlook other structural factors that influence mental health, such as access to health services or environmental stress levels (Alison Hartley et al., 2020; Salah Kassab et al., 2022).

This research problem focuses on how the mental health of students with SEL implementation and its impact on the character of the younger generation in Poltekkes Kemenkes Makassar. Given the background and contextualisation, this issue should be explored more deeply to gain a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the two

variables. Therefore, this study aims to answer key questions, namely: (1) How much does mental health influence the implementation of SEL among university students? (2) How can SEL play a role in improving the mental health and character of the younger generation? and (3) What are the determinants of the social context that influence this relationship? Through this approach to SEL, it is hoped that effective strategies can be found to integrate mental health programmes into the Education curriculum thereby creating a more inclusive learning atmosphere. The significance of this background content and context is not only important from an academic perspective but also applicative. Academically, this research contributes to the limited literature on mental health and SEL in the context of higher education in Indonesia. From a practical perspective, the results are expected to provide recommendations for the development of better intervention programmes at Poltekkes Kemenkes Makassar, as well as other educational institutions that focus on mental health and social emotional learning. By understanding this relationship, it is hoped that education managers can build a framework that is more responsive to student needs, which in turn has a positive impact on improving the quality of education and student well-being.

## **METHODS**

This research seeks to address issues that arise from students' experiences in manifesting social-emotional skills amidst the various mental health challenges they face. The problem that needs to be addressed is the lack of understanding of how students' mental health interacts with the implementation of character education through SEL, and how these two aspects influence each other. This research will be implemented using qualitative methods. The qualitative approach will be implemented through in-depth interviews with a number of students, to explore their perspectives on the relationship between mental health and social emotional learning in their educational context. By drawing on students' direct experiences, the research will complement the quantitative data with in-depth and contextualised narratives. The importance of this part of the research design lies in its ability to provide a holistic approach to addressing this research.

The study respondents consisted of students enrolled at the Poltekkes Kemenkes with special attention to relevant and representative age groups to answer the research problems. The use of a student population at the higher education level is believed to provide a better understanding of the dynamics between mental health and socio-emotional skills in an educational context. Therefore, the researcher will set clear inclusion criteria, such as: active students who are currently studying in the Health Study Programme and aged between 18 to 24 years old. The data collection method that will be used in this study is qualitative interviews with selected students to explore their experiences and views on how their mental health interacts with the development of SEL skills.

Data will be analysed using a mixed approach, following strategies commonly used in education and health research, qualitative data generated from interviews, thematic analysis will be used to explore the experiences and views of students. This method of analysis is able to provide deeper insights into the context and experiences of individuals in educational settings. The researcher will ensure that there is no pressure for respondents to join the study and they have the right to withdraw without consequences. The significance of this ethical consideration includes contributing to socially and academically responsible research.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research shows the importance of understanding the relationship between mental health and social emotional learning (SEL) in shaping the character of the younger generation. Based on the data collected from in-depth interviews, there were significant results related to the development of students' mental health and their social emotional skills. Data analysis showed that students who reported good levels of mental health also had higher social-emotional skills, which was reflected in their ability to collaborate and communicate in study groups. In addition, students with strong emotional support from family and peers showed increased self-confidence and ability to cope with academic challenges, which is crucial in the formation of resilient characters (O. Kravchenko, 2021; P. Beer et al., 2017; Jet P van der Zijden et al., 2023). Comparison with previous research shows that this finding is in line with studies that suggest that good social support contributes positively to mental well-being as well as the development of social skills among adolescents (Alex Gurn et al., 2021; Alison Hartley et al., 2020; A. Simion, 2023). However, these studies also found that college students who experience difficulties in emotion and stress management collaborate less well in groups, leading to decreased participation in social and academic activities (M. Royer, 2017; Christensen et al., 2015; Donaldson et al., 2022). This is in contrast to the results of a study by (K. Tomaszek, 2016), which emphasised that poor emotion management is not always related to a lack of social skills, but also to insufficient social support from the surrounding environment.

Findings from this study indicate a significant relationship between mental health and SEL skills. Data shows that university students who experience good levels of mental health are better able to actively participate in academic and social activities, developing the interpersonal skills necessary to lead productive and competitive lives (O. Kravchenko, 2021; M. Royer, 2017). On the other hand, students facing mental health challenges tend to have lower SEL skills, indicating a direct link between emotional well-being and the ability to engage socially in their communities (Alex Gurn et al., 2021; Christensen et al., 2015; A. Simion, 2023). This finding is in line with research by Durlak et al. (2011), who emphasised that programmes that focus on SEL development can significantly reduce mental health problems and improve social skills (K. Tomaszek, 2016; Donaldson et al., 2022). Research has also noted that social support from neighbours, including family and peers, plays an important role in strengthening students' mental health and SEL skills (P. Beer et al., 2017; José Weinstein et al., 2023). This suggests that interventions that enhance emotional and social support among university students may contribute to improved mental health and better social skills development. For example, previous studies have shown that university students who have access to strong emotional support systems experience better academic outcomes and lower levels of anxiety (Cristian Andrés Jofré Barrera, 2022; Kisha Bird, 2015; Salah Kassab et al., 2022).

Mental health and social-emotional skills (SEL) play a very important role in the character building of young people. Good mental health is a condition where individuals can manage emotions, cope with stress, and build healthy relationships with others. When young people's mental health is in an optimal state, they are more likely to understand themselves, have high self-confidence, and are more resilient in facing life's challenges. Healthy mental health creates a solid foundation for them to be able to develop good social and emotional skills, which will have a direct impact on positive character building.

Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) is an educational approach that focuses on developing five key competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. SEL teaches young people to recognise and manage their emotions,

develop empathy, and foster healthy social relationships. These skills are essential for reducing interpersonal conflict and improving adaptability in diverse social environments. Young people with good SEL skills tend to have the ability to manage social and emotional stress, which in turn supports the formation of a strong and stable character.

The importance of mental health in the process of developing SEL skills is evident in how individuals can apply what they learn in SEL. For example, an adolescent with good mental health will be better able to regulate emotions in difficult situations, such as when feeling anxious or angry. They can use the skills taught in SEL to respond to the situation in a constructive way, such as by speaking calmly or finding a solution that benefits all parties. In contrast, someone with a mental health disorder may struggle to apply SEL skills, as uncontrolled emotions or excessive stress may hinder their ability to empathise, communicate effectively or make good decisions.

Poor mental health is often associated with emotional disorders such as anxiety, depression or chronic stress. These conditions can hinder the development of effective SEL skills. Young people who experience mental illness may find it difficult to focus on self-management or interact positively with others. This can affect the quality of their relationships, exacerbate social isolation, and hinder the development of positive character traits such as responsibility and empathy. Conversely, if mental health is taken seriously and managed well, then the learning process of SEL can take place optimally, resulting in individuals who are better equipped to face life's challenges with wisdom and maturity.

Thus, a strong connection between mental health and SEL can result in young people who not only have good character, but also the ability to adapt and grow in an increasingly complex society. Learning social and emotional skills can strengthen young people's mental resilience, enabling them to cope with life's stresses, manage conflict wisely, and make moral and ethical decisions. Thus, attention to mental health and the application of SEL in education are key to shaping the character of young people who are not only academically intelligent, but also have integrity, empathy, and the ability to contribute positively to society.

This study fills a gap in the literature on mental health and SEL in Indonesia, which remains limited in scope and application in higher education contexts. As such, the findings are academically important in providing evidence that SEL-focused interventions can contribute to improved mental health among young people, while also providing practical insights for educational administrators to develop programmes that can strengthen students' social-emotional skills. As such, this research encourages that collaborative efforts between educational institutions, students and parents are crucial in creating learning environments that are supportive, inclusive and responsive to students' mental health needs (Alex Gurn et al., 2021; Cristian Andrés Jofré Barrera, 2022; Christensen et al., 2015; Han et al., 2019; Donaldson et al., 2022).

## **CONCLUSION**

This research shows that there is a significant positive correlation between optimal mental health and better social-emotional skills, where students who have good mental health participate more actively in their social and academic activities. By analysing the factors that influence the interaction between these two variables, this study successfully answers the research question regarding how mental health can contribute to the effectiveness of social-emotional learning in shaping students' character. The findings emphasise that socio-emotional support from family and peers plays an important role in improving students' mental well-being and social skills, resulting in more resilient individuals in facing challenges.

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