

FROM CLASSROOM TO LIFE: SEL'S ROLE IN INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS UNDER PERMENDIKBUDRISTEK NO. 48/2023

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Abstract: This article examines the implementation of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) as a key strategy for fostering inclusive, student-friendly schools, in line with Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation No. 48 of 2023. SEL is recognized as a holistic approach that enhances not only academic performance but also social, emotional, and character development. The study, conducted at SMKN 5 Samarinda, used a qualitative approach, including observation, interviews, and documentation. The results show that integrating SEL into daily routines and lessons created a conducive classroom environment, increased empathy, self-confidence, and emotional regulation, and strengthened students' social relationships. Furthermore, SEL supports the implementation of inclusive education and prepares students for future workforce challenges. The article highlights the importance of teacher training and policy reinforcement to ensure that SEL is applied systematically and sustainably in all educational settings. The consistent application of SEL is crucial for developing well-rounded students who excel academically and possess the necessary social-emotional skills to thrive in both educational and professional environments.

Keywords: social-emotional learning; inclusive education; ministry of education, culture, research, and technology regulation No. 48/2023; student character; vocational school

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INTRODUCTION

In many communities, education is still narrowly perceived as the mere pursuit of academic achievement. The success of students is often measured solely by their grades in knowledge and skills, while limited attention is given to the development of character, attitude, and emotional growth. This becomes particularly apparent during the distribution of report cards, where parents typically focus only on academic performance rather than personal or social development. In response to this imbalance, the Indonesian government introduced the Pancasila Student Profile Reinforcement Project (P5) as part of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, emphasizing character education and core values as essential components of learning outcomes.

Education, in its true sense, is a holistic process encompassing cognitive, social, emotional, and character development. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) has

emerged as a vital component of modern education, aiming to develop non-academic competencies such as self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, social skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020). A study by Durlak et al. (2011) in *Child Development* showed that implementing SEL programs in schools significantly improved students' academic achievement by 11% and simultaneously reduced negative behaviors such as violence, anxiety, and depression.

Nationally, a study by Mutiani and Faisal (2021) published in the *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter* emphasized that integrating SEL into elementary school learning processes enhanced students' empathy and cooperation. This reinforces the argument that education should not only focus on cognitive knowledge but must also include affective and social dimensions to shape holistic individuals.

From a developmental psychology perspective, Erikson's theory of psychosocial development underscores the importance of social experiences in identity formation. SEL provides a concrete strategy to support students through these stages with healthy emotional guidance particularly in the *industry vs. inferiority* phase, where children need to feel socially accepted and competent (Erikson, 1968). Likewise, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) posits that human development is influenced by multiple social systems family, school, and community all of which can be facilitated through comprehensive and collaborative SEL practices.

The importance of SEL is even more pronounced in the context of the implementation of Permendikbudristek No. 48 of 2023 on Inclusive Education Services, which provides a policy framework for schools to accommodate the learning needs of all students, including those with physical, intellectual, social, or emotional challenges. In this context, SEL serves as a key instrument to build a safe, inclusive, and supportive school climate, as mandated by provisions related to psychosocial support services, differentiated instruction, and the development of a positive school culture.

Research by Schonert-Reichl (2017) in the *Review of Educational Research* also highlighted the importance of teacher training in integrating SEL into the curriculum to strengthen students' mental resilience and social skills for real-world challenges. Teachers trained in SEL are not only able to deliver academic content effectively but also create inclusive and empowering classroom environments.

Further evidence from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) confirms that SEL skills contribute substantially to students' long-term success in the workforce and social life. Skills such as effective communication, empathy, and teamwork are increasingly valued in today's dynamic and collaborative job market.

In the Indonesian context, data from the National Assessment and reports from the Ministry of Education show a growing need to strengthen students' character and well-being amid rising cases of bullying, adolescent depression, and school dropouts. Thus, explicitly and implicitly integrating SEL into learning practices is a strategic move to support inclusive schooling that not only embraces diversity but also ensures that all students grow optimally, both academically and emotionally.

Existing literature and research affirm that SEL is not merely a complementary aspect of education, but a foundational pillar for building transformative inclusive education, as envisioned by Permendikbudristek No. 48 of 2023. Several studies in Indonesia have explored the correlation between SEL and inclusive education. For instance, research by Suryadi and Lestari (2022) in the *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan* demonstrated that schools consistently implementing SEL programs showed higher levels of student participation and social interaction, including among students with special needs. Moreover, SEL practices strengthen differentiated instruction and reduce the risk of discrimination or bullying.

This article also refers to a case study from SMKN 5 Samarinda, which has successfully integrated SEL into its curriculum through both explicit and implicit approaches such as morning reflection routines and “emotion circles” before lessons to foster students’ self-awareness and mental readiness. Interviews with teachers revealed that these methods significantly helped students become more focused, calm, and open to the learning process.

Therefore, this article aims to examine the crucial role of Social and Emotional Learning in building inclusive and supportive schools for all, particularly within the policy framework of inclusive education as mandated in Permendikbudristek No. 48 of 2023.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach using a case study method. The purpose of this approach was to provide an in-depth description of the implementation of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in creating an inclusive and welcoming learning environment at SMKN 5 Samarinda, while also examining how such implementation aligns with the policy framework of Permendikbudristek No. 48 of 2023 concerning Inclusive Education Services.

The research subjects consisted of three vocational teachers who taught in the fields of Social Work, Computer and Network Engineering, and Visual Communication Design. In addition to these, two general subject teachers were involved one teaching Pancasila Education and another teaching Indonesian Language both of whom integrated social-emotional elements into their classroom instruction. The study also engaged five students from different vocational programs who actively participated in character education activities and social-emotional reflection practices.

Data collection was conducted through several interrelated techniques. First, the researcher carried out direct observation during daily instructional activities, morning reflection routines, collaborative projects, and teacher-student interactions in the classroom. Second, in-depth and semi-structured interviews were conducted with both teachers and students to explore their personal experiences, levels of understanding, and challenges faced in implementing SEL. Third, a document study was undertaken, which involved reviewing teaching modules, teachers' reflective journals, students' personal

reflection notes, and school policy documents that supported inclusive education practices.

For data analysis, the study utilized the model developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which includes three stages. The first stage involved data reduction, in which the researcher selected and organized relevant data by summarizing and simplifying the raw information. The second stage involved data display, where information was arranged in a coherent structure to facilitate analysis. The third stage consisted of drawing and verifying conclusions, allowing the researcher to identify emerging patterns and validate interpretations through iterative reflection.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, several strategies were applied. These included triangulation of sources by comparing information from different participants, triangulation of methods by using diverse data collection techniques, and member checking by inviting the participants to review the researcher's interpretations and conclusions for accuracy and credibility.

By using this methodological framework, the study aims to offer a comprehensive and contextualized understanding of how SEL is practiced within a vocational school setting and how the principles of inclusive education are translated into day-to-day learning activities in accordance with current national education policies.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) at SMKN 5 Samarinda demonstrated significant results in enhancing students' social and emotional competencies. Based on data gathered from both students and teachers, and contextualized through the lens of Permendikbudristek No. 48 of 2023 on Inclusive Education Services, several key findings are worth discussing further.

One major finding revealed that SEL played a crucial role in helping students regulate their emotions and improve social interaction. Teachers reported a noticeable shift in classroom atmosphere as students became more capable of recognizing and managing their feelings. Prior to SEL integration, students who struggled with emotional regulation often disrupted the learning process. However, after participating in SEL activities, they gradually learned to express their emotions more appropriately, resulting in a more conducive learning environment. This is in line with broader findings that SEL can foster improved social interaction, as students who were previously withdrawn or confrontational became more cooperative and empathetic. These improvements are essential for fostering an inclusive and supportive school climate.

Another significant outcome was the increase in students' self-confidence. According to student testimonies, activities involving SEL helped them become more comfortable speaking in public and expressing themselves. For instance, one student who previously feared speaking in front of the class noted a clear boost in confidence following regular participation in morning reflections and emotional check-ins. This increase in self-

assurance is especially relevant in vocational education contexts where students must be prepared for professional environments that demand effective communication and interpersonal skills.

In addition to emotional regulation and confidence, SEL contributed to the cultivation of empathy and character among students. Teachers observed that students began to show more understanding toward their peers and became more appreciative of individual differences. This shift not only reduced interpersonal conflict but also fostered a more harmonious school environment. Empathy, as a key component of SEL, supports the principles of inclusive education as outlined in Permendikbudristek No. 48 of 2023, by preventing bullying and other harmful behaviors while promoting mutual respect.

The relevance of SEL is also strongly tied to the regulatory framework of inclusive education. The regulation highlights the importance of equitable access to quality education for all learners, including those with special needs. SEL aligns with this vision by equipping students with the social-emotional tools necessary for navigating diverse learning environments. In the context of SMKN 5 Samarinda, the integration of SEL was observed to foster a more inclusive atmosphere in which every student regardless of their background or learning challenges felt respected and supported.

Furthermore, SEL was found to contribute to students' readiness for the workforce. In vocational settings, the emphasis is not solely on technical skills but also on preparing students for collaborative and adaptive professional environments. SEL promotes critical workforce competencies such as effective communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and responsible decision-making. Teachers emphasized that these attributes are indispensable in real-world workplaces and that students who internalize these skills are likely to perform better in professional settings.

Despite these positive outcomes, the implementation of SEL was not without its challenges. One issue was the varying levels of readiness among students and teachers to adopt this holistic approach. Some students were unfamiliar with self-reflection practices or hesitant to discuss their emotions openly. Meanwhile, some teachers expressed the need for more structured training in SEL pedagogy to effectively integrate the content into their teaching. Another challenge was curriculum alignment. While SEL has been incorporated into extracurricular and co-curricular activities, its integration into academic and vocational subjects remains limited and requires further strengthening.

These findings align with national and international research. Studies by Durlak et al. (2011) demonstrated that school-based SEL programs significantly improve academic performance and reduce negative behaviors. National research by Mutiani and Faisal (2021) similarly supports the role of SEL in enhancing empathy and cooperation among elementary school students. Moreover, the perspectives of Erikson's psychosocial development theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory reinforce the notion that social contexts, including school environments, play a pivotal role in shaping students' personal development. The practical experience of SMKN 5 Samarinda offers valuable insights into how SEL can be tailored to vocational education and implemented

as a vehicle for inclusive school culture.

In summary, the results of this study underscore the transformative potential of SEL in enhancing emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships, and academic engagement. It also highlights the strategic role of SEL in realizing the goals of inclusive education policies in Indonesia. While implementation challenges persist, the promising outcomes observed at SMKN 5 Samarinda demonstrate that SEL is not only feasible in vocational school settings but also critical for preparing students to become competent, empathetic, and resilient members of society.

CONCLUSION

The integration of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) at SMKN 5 Samarinda presents a significant advancement in the practice of inclusive education by fostering a school environment that supports the holistic development of students. Aligned with the framework of Permendikbudristek No. 48 of 2023, the implementation of SEL contributes to a more empathetic, emotionally intelligent, and socially responsible student body. This research highlights how vocational schools can strategically embed SEL into their learning culture to cultivate essential life competencies that go beyond academic achievement. Scientifically, the study reinforces the relevance of psychosocial and ecological theories in education, illustrating how targeted emotional and social interventions can influence student behavior and engagement positively. For broader application, these findings underscore the importance of systemic teacher training and curricular integration to sustain SEL practices effectively. Future research may explore longitudinal impacts of SEL in vocational education, assess its influence on students with diverse learning needs, and develop adaptive SEL models suited to various school contexts across Indonesia.

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