

Exploring the Implementation of Social and Emotional Learning to Support Elementary Students' Social and Emotional Skills in Character Education

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Abstract

Social and emotional skills are essential to elementary students' character development because they shape interpersonal relationships, emotional regulation, and readiness to learn. This study explored the implementation of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in supporting students' social and emotional skills within character education at SDN Pekuncen, Pasuruan City, East Java, Indonesia. A qualitative approach was employed, involving 31 elementary school students and teachers directly involved in SEL implementation. Data were collected through observations and interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis, supplemented by descriptive percentages to summarize observed behavioral patterns. The findings indicated that students demonstrated social and emotional competencies through teamwork, confidence in speaking, respectful behavior, constructive conflict resolution, emotion management, and collaboration during classroom activities and social interactions. The findings also highlighted the role of teachers, curriculum materials, classroom learning, and extracurricular activities in supporting SEL implementation. The distinctive contribution of this study lies in providing a contextual description of how students' social and emotional competencies are manifested in everyday classroom interactions while examining the role of classroom and school-level support in character education. The findings should be interpreted within the qualitative and descriptive scope of the study and not as evidence of statistical effects or causal relationships.

Keywords: Social and Emotional Skills, Social and Emotional Learning, Character Education, Elementary School

Abstrak

Keterampilan sosial dan emosional sangat penting bagi perkembangan karakter peserta didik sekolah dasar karena membentuk hubungan interpersonal, regulasi emosi, dan kesiapan belajar. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi penerapan Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) dalam mendukung keterampilan sosial dan emosional peserta didik dalam pendidikan karakter di SDN Pekuncen, Kota Pasuruan, Jawa Timur, Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan melibatkan 31 peserta didik sekolah dasar dan guru yang terlibat langsung dalam penerapan SEL. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi dan wawancara, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik yang dilengkapi dengan persentase deskriptif untuk merangkum pola perilaku yang diamati. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa peserta didik memperlihatkan kompetensi sosial dan emosional melalui kegiatan kerja sama, kepercayaan diri dalam berbicara, perilaku saling menghargai, penyelesaian

konflik secara konstruktif, pengelolaan emosi, dan kolaborasi selama kegiatan pembelajaran di kelas serta interaksi sosial. Hasil penelitian juga menyoroti peran guru, bahan ajar kurikulum, pembelajaran di kelas, dan kegiatan ekstrakurikuler dalam mendukung penerapan SEL. Kontribusi khas penelitian ini terletak pada penyajian deskripsi kontekstual mengenai bagaimana kompetensi sosial dan emosional peserta didik diwujudkan dalam interaksi sehari-hari di kelas, sekaligus mengkaji peran dukungan di tingkat kelas dan sekolah dalam pendidikan karakter. Temuan penelitian ini perlu ditafsirkan sesuai dengan ruang lingkup penelitian kualitatif dan deskriptif, bukan sebagai bukti adanya pengaruh statistik atau hubungan sebab-akibat.

Kata Kunci: Keterampilan Sosial dan Emosional, Pembelajaran Sosial dan Emosional, Pendidikan Karakter, Sekolah Dasar

Introduction

Social and emotional skills are essential to elementary students' character development because they are related to emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, and students' interactions in educational settings. [Cipriano et al. \(2023\)](#) reviewed the evidence on universal school-based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) interventions, while [Cipriano et al. \(2024\)](#) examined their effects with particular attention to marginalized students. [Wigelsworth et al. \(2022\)](#) also reviewed the evidence for SEL in primary schools. Together, these studies provide a basis for examining SEL as an approach to supporting students' social and emotional competencies in elementary education. Research on school-based SEL has also examined student competencies and program outcomes, including the study by [Coelho et al. \(2023\)](#) on a Portuguese social-emotional learning program and the umbrella review by [Moreno et al. \(2024\)](#) on social-emotional development programs in primary education.

Previous studies have examined SEL implementation through different instructional practices and educational contexts. In Indonesia, [Lestari & Azizah \(2023\)](#) investigated the implementation of a social-emotional learning approach in elementary schools, while [Nuraeni et al. \(2023\)](#) discussed the integration of social and emotional learning into elementary classroom instruction. [Nurfauziah et al. \(2025\)](#) reviewed SEL implementation in the elementary learning process. Research has also explored SEL integration into specific subjects: [Tyas et al. \(2024\)](#) investigated its integration into measurement learning in Grade IV, and [Yulianto & Mushafanah \(2024\)](#) examined an integrated problem-based learning model incorporating SEL in Grade IV Indonesian-language learning. These studies illustrate the range of contexts in which SEL has been examined in Indonesian elementary education.

International research has also investigated teacher practices, school-level support, and interventions related to SEL. [Al-Jbouri et al. \(2023\)](#) evaluated a teacher-led intervention intended to develop elementary students' social and emotional skills. [Dyson et al. \(2023\)](#) explored educators' perspectives on SEL at a high-needs rural elementary school, while [Jomaa et al. \(2023\)](#) examined elementary teachers' perceptions and experiences of SEL in Ontario. [Kaspar & Massey \(2023\)](#) addressed the implementation of SEL in elementary classrooms. At the school-wide level, [Domitrovich et al. \(2025\)](#) examined the CASEL School Guide and its relationship to organizational capacity for SEL and systemic implementation. [Aguilar-Raab et al. \(2026\)](#) investigated empathy and SEL through a whole-school approach in a German elementary school. Other studies have examined SEL programs in different contexts, including a quasi-experimental study of an SEL program in China by [Shi & Cheung \(2024\)](#) and a theatre-based SEL program intended to foster friendship quality among elementary students by [Zakaria et al. \(2024\)](#).

Although these studies provide insights into SEL programs, instructional practices, and school-wide implementation, further contextual investigation is needed to describe how students' observable social and emotional behaviors appear alongside the educational practices supporting SEL within the same school setting. Examining students' behaviors together with teacher practices, curriculum materials, classroom learning, and extracurricular activities may provide a more comprehensive account of SEL implementation in character education. This study addresses this need by examining students' observable behaviors and the educational support for SEL within an elementary school in Indonesia.

Accordingly, this study explores the implementation of Social and Emotional Learning in supporting elementary students' social and emotional skills within character education at SDN Pekuncen, Pasuruan City, East Java, Indonesia. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the study examines students' behaviors during classroom activities and social interactions and investigates the educational practices supporting SEL implementation. Thematic analysis is used to interpret observation and interview data, while descriptive percentages are used only as supplementary summaries of observed behavioral patterns. The study does not seek to establish causal relationships or measure the statistical effects of SEL.

This study addresses two research questions: (1) How are students' social and emotional competencies manifested in their everyday classroom activities and social interactions during SEL implementation? and (2) How do teachers, curriculum materials, classroom learning, and extracurricular activities support SEL implementation in character education? The study contributes a context-specific account of SEL implementation in Indonesian elementary education by considering students' observable behaviors alongside classroom and school-level support. Its findings are intended to describe implementation within the research setting rather than establish causal effects or generalize beyond the study context.

Research Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine SEL implementation in supporting elementary students' social and emotional skills within character education. The approach focused on observable student behaviors, classroom interactions, and educational practices in a natural school setting. Thematic analysis was the primary method for interpreting observation and interview data, while descriptive percentages supplemented the findings by summarizing observed behavioral patterns.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at SDN Pekuncen, Pasuruan City, East Java, Indonesia, from April to June 2026. Participants included 31 fifth-grade students and teachers involved in SEL implementation. Students were the primary participants, while teachers provided information about instructional practices, classroom management, and school support for SEL. The participants provided information on students' social and emotional competencies and the educational practices supporting SEL implementation.

Research Procedure

The research involved four stages: problem identification, planning, SEL

implementation, and evaluation and data analysis. First, the researcher identified the research focus and relevant classroom context. Second, an observation sheet and interview guidelines were prepared based on the five core SEL competencies and the study objectives. Third, observations of classroom activities and student interactions were conducted alongside interviews with students and teachers. Finally, the data were reviewed, recurring patterns identified, information from different sources compared, and findings interpreted in relation to the research questions.

Data collection took place from April to June 2026. Figure 1 illustrates the research procedure.

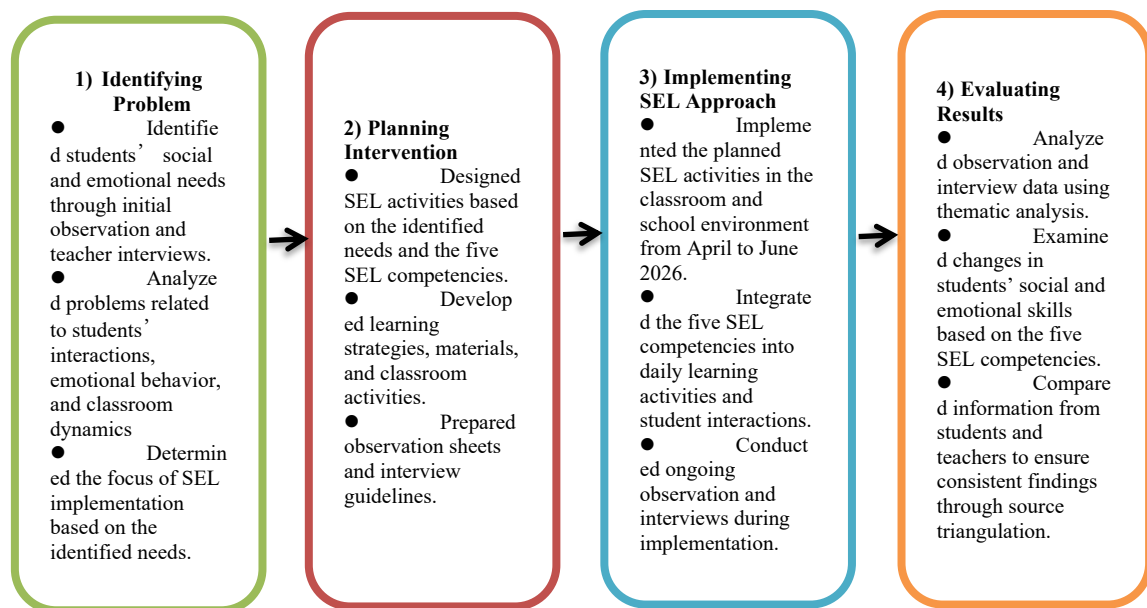


Figure 1. Research Procedure for the Implementation of Social and Emotional Learning (Sel)

Research Instruments

The instruments consisted of an observation sheet and semi-structured interview guidelines based on the five SEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2020). The observation sheet documented students' observable behaviors during classroom activities and peer interactions, while interviews explored participants' experiences and perspectives on SEL implementation.

Indicators and questions were aligned with the research objectives. The observation indicators translated the five competencies into observable classroom behaviors, as presented in Table 1.

Observation Sheet

The observation sheet documented students' observable social and emotional behaviors during classroom learning and peer interactions. Indicators were organized according to the five SEL competencies, with examples and behavioral criteria presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Indicators and Behavioral Criteria for the Observation Sheet

SEL Competency	Observation Indicator	Example of Observable Behavior
Self-awareness	Recognizing and expressing emotions and personal strengths or difficulties	Expresses feelings or identifies difficulties experienced during learning activities.
Self-management	Regulating emotions and behavior in challenging situations	Demonstrates an appropriate response when facing difficulties or receiving feedback.
Social awareness	Demonstrating empathy, respect, and awareness of others' perspectives	Listens to peers, shows consideration for others, or responds respectfully to different opinions.
Relationship skills	Communicating, cooperating, and managing interpersonal disagreements	Shares responsibilities during group work, communicates with peers, or attempts to resolve disagreements constructively.
Responsible decision-making	Considering consequences and making responsible choices	Considers possible consequences before choosing an action in a classroom or social situation.

The behavioral examples in Table 1 should reflect the observation sheet used in the study. Observations documented students' behaviors and their contexts without inferring internal emotional states solely from outward actions.

Interview Guidelines

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain further information about students' experiences and the implementation of SEL in classroom and school activities. The interviews complemented the observations by providing additional perspectives on students' social and emotional experiences, teacher practices, and school support.

The interview questions were adapted to the participants' roles. Questions for students focused on their experiences during classroom learning and interactions with peers, whereas questions for teachers focused on instructional strategies, classroom practices, and the resources supporting SEL implementation. Examples of questions are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Examples of Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Participant	Example Interview Questions
Students	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you usually do when you feel upset or experience difficulties during classroom activities? 2. How do you respond when you disagree with a classmate? 3. Can you describe an experience in which you helped a friend during a learning activity? 4. What classroom activities help you practice cooperation and respect for others?
Teachers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do you incorporate social and emotional skills into classroom learning? 2. What strategies do you use to support students in managing their emotions and interacting with peers? 3. How do curriculum materials and school activities support SEL implementation? 4. What social and emotional behaviors have you observed among students during learning activities?

The interview data were documented in written records and analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to the implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL).

Data Collection

Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews from April to June 2026. Observations focused on students' behaviors and their contexts in relation to the five SEL competencies. Student interviews explored emotional regulation, cooperation, communication, and peer interactions, while teacher interviews examined instructional practices and classroom and school support for SEL. Observation and interview data were compared to identify converging, complementary, or differing information.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed thematically through four stages: familiarization, initial coding, categorization, and theme development. Observation and interview records were reviewed to identify relevant information, group related codes into categories, and develop themes aligned with the research questions and the five SEL competencies. The analysis focused on identifying patterns in students' social and emotional behaviors and the educational practices supporting SEL implementation.

Trustworthiness of the Data

Trustworthiness was addressed through triangulation of observations and interviews to identify converging, complementary, or conflicting information. Discrepancies were examined in context, and interpretations were retained only when supported by the evidence. Data excerpts were linked to initial codes, categories, and themes.

Ethical Considerations

The study involved elementary students and teachers. The manuscript should specify the actual procedures for obtaining school permission and participant consent or assent, including parental or guardian consent where applicable. Participants' identities must be protected, and classroom photographs must comply with applicable consent, school, and publication requirements.



Figure 2 Documentation of Students' Classroom Activities: (a) Collaborative Group Activity; (B) Peer Interaction During Learning Activities.

Figure 2 provides visual documentation of students' participation in collaborative classroom activities and peer interactions. These activities offer a context for examining students' relationship skills, particularly cooperation and communication during group work. However, the photographs serve as supplementary documentation rather than independent evidence of students' social and emotional competencies. Interpretations of

the observed behaviors are based on the observation records and interview data.

Results

This study examined Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) implementation in supporting fifth-grade students' social and emotional skills within character education at SDN Pekuncen, Pasuruan City, East Java, Indonesia. Findings cover students' classroom behaviors and interactions, as well as school support through teacher practices, curriculum materials, classroom learning, and extracurricular activities. Observation and interview data were analyzed thematically, with descriptive percentages used only when verifiable from the original records.

Students' Social and Emotional Behaviors

Observations examined students' cooperation, communication, emotional regulation, respectful interactions, responses to disagreements, and participation in collaborative activities in relation to the five SEL competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

The analysis emphasized observable behaviors rather than assumptions about internal emotional states. Cooperation was linked to relationship skills, respectful interactions to social awareness, and responses to challenging situations to self-management. Expression of ideas and consideration of consequences were also examined when supported by the records.

Table 3 presents the behavioral indicators and observation criteria. Percentages were retained only when their numerators, denominators, units of analysis, and calculation procedures could be verified against the original records.

Table 3 Student Social and Emotional Behavior Indicators and Observation Criteria

Behavioral indicator	SEL competency	Observation criteria
Teamwork and cooperation	Relationship skills	Observable cooperation and contribution to shared tasks
Confidence in speaking	Self-awareness and/or relationship skills	Expression of ideas or opinions during classroom interactions
Constructive conflict resolution	Relationship skills	Observable responses to disagreements with peers
Emotion management	Self-management	Observable responses to frustration or challenging situations
Use of emotional regulation techniques	Self-management	Use of an identifiable regulation strategy, when documented
Appropriate behavior in challenging situations	Self-management and/or responsible decision-making	Responses consistent with the relevant behavioral criteria
Respectful behavior	Social awareness	Respectful responses to peers and their contributions
Willingness to collaborate	Relationship skills	Observable participation or willingness to engage in collaborative tasks

The behavioral indicators and observation criteria were used to organize the qualitative analysis of students' social and emotional behaviors. Interpretations were based on the available observation records and interview data.

The qualitative interpretation of these indicators should be supported by selected

observation records and interview statements. For example, an observation record describing students sharing responsibilities during a group task may provide evidence of cooperation. Similarly, a record describing a student listening respectfully to a peer may support an interpretation related to social awareness or relationship skills. Such examples should be included in the final findings only when the corresponding behaviors are documented in the original research data.

Teacher and School Support for Sel Implementation

In addition to students' behaviors, the study examined teacher involvement in SEL, its integration into classroom learning, curriculum materials, and extracurricular activities. These indicators were analyzed separately because they represent different units of analysis, including teachers or teaching sessions, curriculum documents, and extracurricular activities.

Table 4 Educational Support Indicators for Sel Implementation

Support dimension	Indicator	Evidence to be examined	Unit of analysis	Qualitative Evidence
Teacher practices	Teaching social and emotional skills	Observation records and interview statements describing relevant teaching practices	Teacher, lesson, or teaching session	Evidence of teaching practices documented in the original records
Classroom learning	Integration of SEL into learning activities	Records documenting how social and emotional skills were addressed during learning	Lesson, classroom, or activity	Evidence of SEL integration documented during classroom activities
Curriculum materials	Inclusion of SEL-related content	Curriculum materials or documents examined during the research	Document or curriculum material	Relevant SEL content identified in the materials examined
Extracurricular activities	Opportunities to practice social and emotional competencies	Observation records or interviews describing relevant extracurricular activities	Activity or observed session	Evidence of relevant opportunities documented in the original records

The qualitative evidence was examined in relation to each support indicator using the available observation records, interview data, and curriculum documents. Interpretations were limited to evidence documented during the study..

The support indicators provide a framework for examining how SEL was addressed in the educational environment. Teacher practices and classroom learning can provide opportunities for students to practice communication, cooperation, and emotional regulation. Curriculum materials and extracurricular activities may provide additional contexts for practicing social and emotional competencies when such opportunities are documented in the data.

Qualitative Evidence and Thematic Findings

The thematic analysis was used to organize observation and interview data into meaningful patterns related to students' social and emotional behaviors and the educational practices supporting SEL implementation. The analysis involved identifying relevant data

excerpts, assigning initial codes, grouping related codes into categories, and developing themes that addressed the research questions.

Classroom Activities as Supporting Documentation

Figure 2 Presents Photographs of Students' Classroom Activities and Peer Interactions, Providing Context for the Learning Environment in Which Social and Emotional Behaviors Were Examined.

Figure 2. Documentation of Students' Classroom Activities: (a) Collaborative Group Activity; (b) Peer Interaction During Learning Activities. The photographs provide contextual evidence of classroom activities but cannot independently establish students' SEL competencies. Interpretations of cooperation, communication, emotional regulation, and other behaviors must be supported by corresponding observation records and interview data.

Summary of the Findings

The findings cover two dimensions: students' observable social and emotional behaviors and the educational support for SEL through teacher practices, curriculum materials, classroom learning, and extracurricular activities. These dimensions were examined thematically using observation and interview data, with descriptive percentages included only when their calculations could be verified. The findings describe patterns within the study context and do not establish causal effects or statistical representativeness beyond the participants examined.

Discussion

Students' Social and Emotional Competencies in Classroom Interactions

The findings highlight the importance of examining students' social and emotional competencies through everyday classroom interactions. The observed indicators included cooperation, confidence in expressing ideas, respectful behavior, emotional regulation, and responses to interpersonal disagreements. These behaviors can reflect SEL competencies when supported by observation and interview evidence.

Cooperation during group activities may reflect relationship skills through communication, shared responsibilities, and coordination with peers. Respectful interaction and expressing ideas also provide opportunities to practice social awareness and relationship skills. Meanwhile, responses to difficulties or disagreements can offer insight into self-management. These interpretations are consistent with previous studies on SEL and students' interpersonal competencies (Cipriano et al., 2023, 2024; Coelho et al., 2023; Moreno et al., 2024; Wigelsworth et al., 2022). However, individual observations cannot establish stable personal characteristics or improvements over time. This study therefore provides a contextual description of students' observable behaviors rather than evidence of causal effects.

The five competencies used to organize the observation protocol in this study, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, correspond to the core competence framework articulated by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020). Anchoring the observation indicators in this framework strengthens the construct alignment of the present study with the broader SEL literature; however, it also exposes a recurring tension in observational SEL research, namely that behavioral indicators rarely map onto a single

competency in isolation. Confidence in speaking, for instance, was coded in relation to both self-awareness and relationship skills in this study, reflecting the conceptual overlap between recognizing one's own capacity to communicate and the interpersonal skill of engaging others. Rather than treating this overlap as a weakness to be eliminated, it is more productive to read it as evidence that the five CASEL competencies function less as discrete, mutually exclusive categories and more as interacting dimensions of a single underlying construct, social and emotional competence, that manifests jointly in classroom behavior. Future coding frameworks in qualitative SEL research may therefore benefit from explicitly modeling cross-competency behaviors rather than forcing single-category classification.

The consistency between the behaviors observed in this study and the patterns reported in large-scale reviews and meta-analyses (Cipriano et al., 2023, 2024; Moreno et al., 2024; Wigelsworth et al., 2022) also deserves closer scrutiny than a simple statement of convergence. Those meta-analyses aggregate effect sizes across numerous controlled or quasi-experimental studies to estimate the average magnitude of SEL's influence on students' social, emotional, and academic outcomes, and their contribution lies in establishing that a relationship between SEL programming and competency development exists at a population level. The present study cannot speak to magnitude, average effect, or population-level generalizability. What it can offer, and what aggregated meta-analytic evidence by design cannot, is a fine-grained description of what these competencies look like as they are lived out in a specific classroom, including the texture of how a fifth-grade student negotiates a disagreement with a peer or the specific verbal and nonverbal cues through which emotional regulation is recognized in situ. The relationship between this study and the meta-analytic literature is therefore better characterized as complementary rather than confirmatory: the meta-analyses establish that SEL matters on average, while studies of this kind help explain what that mattering concretely consists of within a particular cultural and institutional setting. Treating qualitative convergence with quantitative meta-analytic findings as a form of validation, without acknowledging this difference in epistemic function, risks overstating what either body of evidence can establish on its own.

Teacher Practices and Classroom Support for Sel

Teachers can create opportunities for students to practice social and emotional competencies through activities that encourage respectful communication, cooperation, emotional expression, and constructive responses to disagreement. Examining teacher practices alongside student behaviors helps describe how classroom activities provide opportunities to exercise these competencies.

However, reported teaching practices do not necessarily correspond consistently with students' observed behaviors. Interviews reflect teachers' perspectives, whereas observations document behavior in specific situations. Comparing these sources helps identify similarities and differences without assuming that particular teaching strategies directly produce specific outcomes. This interpretation aligns with research on educators' roles and classroom practices in SEL implementation (Dyson et al., 2023; Jomaa et al., 2023). The present study contributes a contextual account of teacher practices and students' observable behaviors within the same school setting.

This potential divergence between teachers' reported practices and students' observed behaviors is not merely a methodological caveat to be noted in passing; it reflects a well-recognized asymmetry between self-report and observational data in educational

research. Teachers describing their own instructional strategies in an interview are susceptible to social desirability bias, a tendency to describe practice in terms that align with professional expectations, independent of how consistently those practices are enacted in daily instruction. Observational data, in turn, capture behavior only within the specific sessions sampled and may miss practices that occur outside the observed timeframe or that are enacted inconsistently across lessons. Rather than resolving this tension by privileging one data source over the other, this study treats the two forms of evidence as capturing different layers of the same phenomenon: interviews reveal teachers' intended and perceived pedagogical repertoire, while observations reveal its situated enactment. Reporting points of convergence and divergence transparently, rather than blending the two sources into a single undifferentiated account, preserves the interpretive integrity of the findings.

Jomaa et al. (2023) and Dyson et al. (2023) similarly caution that teachers' perceptions of SEL implementation are shaped by the structural conditions of their schools, including time constraints, competing curricular demands, and the availability of professional development, rather than by pedagogical intent alone. Read alongside these studies, the present findings suggest that teacher practices observed at SDN Pekuncen should not be interpreted as a direct, unmediated cause of the social and emotional behaviors documented among students. A more defensible reading is that teacher practices constitute one of several contextual affordances, opportunities that make certain behaviors more likely to occur without guaranteeing that they will, operating alongside peer dynamics, classroom culture, and individual student dispositions that this study was not designed to isolate.

Curriculum Materials and Extracurricular Activities as School-Level Support

Curriculum materials, classroom learning, and extracurricular activities may provide opportunities for students to practice communication, cooperation, respect, and responsible decision-making. However, the availability of these resources does not necessarily demonstrate that students have developed the corresponding competencies. Their contribution must be examined through evidence of how they are used and how students participate.

Distinguishing between available resources, their implementation, and students' observed behaviors helps prevent school-level support from being treated as equivalent to student outcomes. This perspective is consistent with studies examining classroom practices and broader educational conditions in SEL implementation (Dyson et al., 2023; Jomaa et al., 2023; Kaspar & Massey, 2023). By considering these dimensions together, the present study provides a contextual description of SEL support in an Indonesian elementary school without establishing causal relationships.

The distinction this study draws between the availability of SEL-supportive resources and evidence of their active use echoes a broader concern in implementation science, namely that the presence of a curriculum document, policy statement, or extracurricular program on paper is not equivalent to its fidelity of implementation in practice. Domitrovich et al. (2025) make a comparable argument at the school-wide level, showing that organizational capacity, rather than the mere existence of a framework such as the CASEL School Guide, determines whether systemic SEL implementation is realized. Applying this logic to the present findings, the identification of SEL-related content in curriculum materials or the existence of extracurricular activities with apparent relevance

to social and emotional competencies should be treated as necessary but insufficient evidence of school-level support; what ultimately matters is whether, and how consistently, these resources are translated into the lived classroom and extracurricular experiences documented in the observation and interview data.

Interpreting the Qualitative Evidence and Descriptive Percentages

Descriptive percentages can summarize observed behaviors, but their interpretation depends on the calculation procedure, denominator, observation criteria, and unit of analysis. Percentages based on students, teachers, classroom activities, or observation sessions should not be directly compared because they represent different units.

All numerical results must therefore be checked against the original research records. Percentages that cannot be verified should be removed or replaced with qualitative descriptions supported by available evidence. Observation records document behavior in specific situations, while interviews provide participants' perspectives. Comparing these sources helps identify converging or differing accounts and interpret them in context. Accordingly, percentages serve only as supplementary summaries, not evidence of statistical significance, causal effects, or developmental change.

Beyond the arithmetic verifiability emphasized above, the decision to rely on qualitative behavioral coding rather than standardized self-report or rating-scale instruments carries its own trade-offs for construct validity. Standardized SEL rating scales offer psychometric properties, such as established reliability coefficients and normative benchmarks, that allow scores to be compared across studies and contexts; however, such scales also risk reducing complex, context-dependent social behavior to a small number of Likert-type items that may not capture how competencies are enacted in a specific cultural and classroom setting. The present study's reliance on observation records anchored in explicit behavioral criteria (Table 3) represents a deliberate trade-off in the opposite direction, in which interpretive richness and contextual fidelity are gained at the cost of standardized comparability. Readers seeking to relate the present findings to the effect sizes reported in meta-analytic SEL research should therefore treat the two bodies of evidence as methodologically distinct rather than as directly comparable results on the same underlying scale.

Implications for Character Education in Elementary Schools

The findings highlight how social and emotional competencies can be examined through students' everyday interactions, including cooperation, communication, respectful responses, and emotional regulation. This perspective connects character education with observable classroom practices.

Teacher strategies, classroom activities, curriculum materials, and extracurricular programs may offer different opportunities to practice these competencies. Examining them alongside student interactions provides a broader account of SEL implementation than considering student behavior or teacher reports alone. For educators, documenting specific situations in which students exercise these competencies may help identify opportunities for further support. However, these implications should not be interpreted as evidence that the practices examined constitute effective interventions.

Within the Indonesian education policy context, these findings are also relevant to the character dimensions articulated in the Profil Pelajar Pancasila under Kurikulum

Merdeka, which likewise emphasizes attributes such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), independence, and critical reasoning alongside academic competence. The behavioral indicators examined in this study, including cooperation, respectful interaction, and responsible decision-making, overlap conceptually with several of these nationally mandated character dimensions, suggesting that SEL-informed observation protocols of the kind developed here could offer elementary schools a concrete, classroom-level vocabulary for documenting character education outcomes that are otherwise often assessed only through broad teacher judgment. At the same time, this conceptual overlap should not be read as evidence that SEL and Profil Pelajar Pancasila are interchangeable frameworks; the latter is a national policy construct embedded in Indonesia's own cultural and civic values, and any attempt to map SEL competencies onto it in future research would need to attend carefully to where the two frameworks' underlying assumptions about the self, community, and moral development converge and where they diverge.

Limitations and Directions for Further Research

This study was conducted at one elementary school and involved 31 fifth-grade students and participating teachers. Its findings are therefore context-specific and should not automatically be generalized to other schools. The study also relied on observations and interviews, which capture different aspects of classroom experiences and may produce differing accounts.

Furthermore, the qualitative descriptive design does not establish whether SEL implementation caused changes in students' social and emotional competencies. Such claims would require appropriate baseline data, repeated measurements, or a suitable comparison design. Future research could examine multiple elementary schools over longer periods using clearly defined observation criteria, transparent coding procedures, and systematically documented student and teacher perspectives. This could provide further insight into the relationship between SEL practices, student participation, and changes in social and emotional competencies.

An additional limitation concerns the coding process itself. Although the trustworthiness procedures described in the Method section relied on triangulation across observation and interview data, the manuscript does not report whether coding was conducted by more than one researcher or whether inter-coder agreement was assessed. Single-coder qualitative analysis, however systematically conducted, remains vulnerable to interpretive drift, the gradual and often unconscious shift in how a researcher applies a code over the course of a lengthy analysis, particularly when behavioral indicators for different competencies conceptually overlap, as noted earlier in this discussion. Future studies adopting a similar observational framework would strengthen the credibility of their findings by reporting a second coder's independent classification of a subset of the data, together with a corresponding agreement statistic, alongside the triangulation procedures already employed in this study.

Conclusion

This study explored Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) implementation in supporting fifth-grade students' social and emotional skills at SDN Pekuncen, Pasuruan City, Indonesia. The findings highlight how everyday classroom interactions and educational support from teachers, curriculum materials, and school activities provide opportunities to practice cooperation, respectful communication, emotional regulation, and responsible

decision-making. Although these insights may inform classroom practices, the study does not establish causal effects or intervention effectiveness. Given its qualitative descriptive approach and single-school setting, the findings are context-specific; future research could examine SEL implementation across schools and investigate changes in students' competencies over time using appropriate research designs.

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AI Acknowledgment

The authors declare that they used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to assist with language editing, grammar improvement, translation, and manuscript revision. Despite using AI, the authors affirm that they are fully responsible for the content of this article, as outlined in the COPE recommendations.

Participant Consent

This research was conducted with permission from the school authorities. The students participated in the research activities as part of the school-based learning activities, and the research procedures were explained to the participants before data collection.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

E.B.F. conceived the research idea, designed the methodology, carried out the investigation, collected and curated the data, performed the formal analysis, and drafted the original manuscript. The two remaining authors, S.A. and S.M., supervised the study; S.A. also contributed to the conceptualization, while S.M. carried out the validation, and both participated in reviewing and editing the manuscript. All authors declare that the final version of this paper has been read and approved. The total percentage contribution for the conceptualization, drafting, and correction of this paper is as follows: E.B.F. 50%, S.A. 25%, and S.M. 25%.

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