



Effectiveness of EMC² Social Emotional Attitudes on Mental Health of Elementary School Students

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Abstract: This study addresses the problem of declining character values and increasing mental health challenges among elementary school students, which are exacerbated by rapid social changes and insufficient emotional support in educational settings. The research aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the EMC² Social Emotional Attitude program in supporting students' mental health and developing their emotional and social skills. Quantitative research design, data were collected using questionnaires and in-depth interviews with selected participants. The findings reveal that the majority of students reported significant benefits from the EMC² program, including improvements in emotional regulation, self-esteem, and classroom interaction. Students felt more valued, confident, and emotionally stable in their daily school experiences. These results confirm that the EMC² approach has a positive impact on students' mental health and provides a viable model for character education in elementary schools. The study highlights the importance of ongoing collaboration among teachers, schools, and families in fostering the development of students' social-emotional competencies and overall well-being.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengangkat permasalahan menurunnya nilai karakter dan meningkatnya tantangan kesehatan mental pada siswa sekolah dasar, yang diperparah oleh perubahan sosial yang cepat serta kurangnya dukungan emosional di lingkungan pendidikan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi efektivitas program Sikap Sosial Emosional EMC² dalam mendukung kesehatan mental serta pengembangan keterampilan emosional dan sosial siswa. Desain penelitian ini kuantitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui angket dan wawancara mendalam dengan peserta terpilih. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mayoritas siswa merasakan manfaat signifikan dari program EMC², antara lain peningkatan regulasi emosi, kepercayaan diri, dan interaksi di kelas. Siswa merasa lebih dihargai, percaya diri, dan stabil secara emosional dalam pengalaman sehari-hari di sekolah. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa pendekatan EMC² memberikan kontribusi positif terhadap kesehatan mental siswa dan dapat menjadi model yang layak untuk pendidikan karakter di sekolah dasar. Studi ini menekankan pentingnya kolaborasi berkelanjutan antara guru, sekolah, dan keluarga untuk mempertahankan pengembangan kompetensi sosial-emosional dan kesejahteraan siswa secara menyeluruh.

A. Introduction

Education is a process that prioritizes human values, thereby helping individuals develop into more humane individuals (Ujud et al., 2023). Education also serves as a medium for developing a person's intelligence and skills (Assa et al., 2022). Based on Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, education can be understood as a series of processes carried out with awareness and careful planning, aimed at creating a learning environment and learning activities that enable students to optimize the development of their potential. Themselves (Marhamah, 2023). Education aims to realize individuals' potential, meet their needs, and develop their abilities, enabling them to lead fulfilling personal and social lives. Thus, education benefits children today in their development toward adulthood, not just as preparation for the future (Rahman et al., 2022).

Character education is a crucial component of the education system that aims to cultivate a generation with integrity, strong morals, and the ability to face various life challenges. Especially at the elementary school level, instilling character values is crucial because this period is the most appropriate time to effectively shape students' personalities (Listiana et al., 2023). This aligns with the primary objective of national education, which prioritizes the development of good character alongside academic achievement (Suhara et al., 2025). Rapid societal developments have led to changes in social norms, which in turn have impacted individual behavior. During childhood, these behavioral changes are particularly noticeable. A lack of responsibility and declining manners reflect the negative impact of these societal changes. Children who previously prioritized good character, ethics, and responsibility now face temptations that can influence these attitudes (Shinta & Ain, 2021). These changes not only affect social behavior but can also influence mental health.

According to the WHO, mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual can cope with the stresses of life, work productively, and make a positive contribution to their community (Desi et al., 2020). Mental health plays an important role in determining a person's ability to carry out activities and achieve goals without feeling burdened or depressed (Kibtiyah et al., 2024). Mental education in elementary schools is essential to pay attention to because students' mental health affects their ability to learn and function properly. In addition, mental health also plays a role in students' ability to cope with disorders such as depression and stress. Good mental health also supports students' ability to maintain healthy relationships with other individuals, both in school and family environments (Aditia et al., 2024).

Based on UNESCO and the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education (Moningka, 2022), *Empathy, Compassion, Mindfulness, and Critical Inquiry (EMC2) skills*. Empathy is the ability to feel and understand the situations experienced by others and is the starting point for prosocial behavior (Mulyawati et al., 2022). Empathy means being able to understand other people's thoughts, feelings, and emotions, as well as having the ability to feel what others feel and put yourself in their shoes (Nurhayati & Handayani, 2020). Compassion is a mental attitude that enables one to perceive and understand the suffering and experiences of others, while also possessing the ability to alleviate that suffering with kindness, empathy,

willingness, and patience (Desiningrum et al., 2020). Mindfulness is an awareness that is formed through deliberately paying attention to the present moment, without judgment, uniquely and continuously (Wicaksono et al., 2022). In the world of education, critical thinking skills play a significant role. Critical thinking is not just a description of how someone thinks, but also involves the learning process, the ability to process thoughts, and a skeptical attitude or unwillingness to accept information at face value (Mulyani, 2022).

The current social phenomenon poses a serious obstacle, especially since many people with severe mental disorders in developing countries do not receive adequate treatment for their conditions (Haryanti et al., 2024). Mental and emotional disorders in elementary school children are becoming a serious concern due to their significant impact on their overall development. Children at this age are very vulnerable to various problems such as anxiety, depression, and behavioral disorders (Yonaevy & Prananingrum, 2024). This also affects children who experience excessive psychological stress, which ultimately hinders their social development, mental health, and academic performance at school (Faizah et al., 2023). This situation highlights the importance of paying more serious attention to and addressing mental health issues to support the optimal growth and development of the younger generation.

The development of social and emotional skills necessary for success in life is a primary reason why social and emotional learning (SEL) is so important. Self-awareness, emotional regulation, social skills, and social responsibility are the four core competencies that form the foundation of SEL. SEL has a significant impact on the motivation of elementary school students to learn in an educational environment (Avandra et al., 2023). Every individual, including elementary school students aged seven to twelve, has critical mental needs for psychological well-being (Artati et al., 2023). Due to its significant impact on overall child development, mental and emotional illness in elementary school students is receiving increasing attention. Children are vulnerable to several problems at this age, including behavioral disorders, anxiety, and depression (Yonaevy & Prananingrum, 2024).

However, schools are the perfect environment for prevention, detection, and early intervention of mental health issues in children and adolescents. In addition to being a place of learning, schools are also spaces where students spend most of their time interacting with peers and teachers. The school environment plays an important role in detecting, preventing, and addressing mental health issues in students. As key figures in schools, teachers have a significant responsibility to provide support for their students' mental health (Marianty et al., 2025). The influence of schools on students' mental health is greatly influenced by the role of teachers in promoting psychological well-being. Cooperation with teachers is key to creating change at the school, classroom, and individual teacher levels. Mental health service models that involve external parties or academics to support teachers, families, and children are a practical approach to improving the prevention, detection, and treatment of children's emotional and behavioral problems in the school environment (Merdiaty & Febrieta, 2023).

In addition to providing the necessities and services that encourage learning and potential development, schools also serve as a space and medium for students to build their mental health, ensuring that they can produce a generation that will bring pride to the nation (Fithriani, 2025). In addition to being the responsibility of educators and parents, schools, communities, and educational institutions must work together to support mental health. Several internal and external variables influence students' mental health. Therefore, it is essential to actively identify signs of mental health problems, understand how they affect learning, and apply appropriate diagnosis and intervention techniques (Sanusi, 2023). This study is likely to make a significant contribution to the development of educational interventions that promote students' psychological well-being through efficient EMC² social-emotional attitude development strategies. Additionally, the findings from this research make significant contributions to initiatives aimed at improving teaching standards and student well-being in elementary schools, particularly in promoting their mental health through the development of social-emotional attitudes such as empathy, awareness, kindness, and critical thinking.

Teachers play a very significant role in character formation through education today because they are the primary drivers in guiding students in cultivating positive values, attitudes, and behaviors (Ahmad & Arkiang, 2021). Teachers not only convey the concept of good character but also guide students in applying it to their daily lives. In addition, teachers, as role models, must demonstrate positive character traits themselves (Mardiana et al., 2024). As shown by previous research, the character traits of students are relatively low, with a percentage of 51%. This is evident when they are reluctant to stop conflicts in the classroom or prefer to remain silent when their friends are being teased (Mulyawati et al., 2022). This can lead to mental health issues among the students involved.

The novelty of this study lies in the application of the EMC² strategy as an innovative approach that integrates character building and mental health in the context of primary education. This strategy not only emphasizes academic achievement but also prioritizes the development of empathy, self-awareness, compassion, and critical thinking as essential elements in fostering students' psychological resilience. The EMC² approach offers a holistic and contextual intervention model, which has yet to be a focal point in similar studies at the elementary school level in Indonesia. Thus, this research makes significant contributions both theoretically and practically to efforts aimed at improving students' psychological well-being and the quality of character education.

Based on this background and novelty, the purpose of this study is to understand the effectiveness of applying the EMC² strategy in supporting mental health and character development in elementary school students. The results of this study are expected to provide insights for teachers and educators regarding the application of EMC²-based social-emotional attitudes as an effective character education strategy. Additionally, the findings from this study are also expected to serve as a reference in developing more relevant and contextual character education methods, as well as contributing scientifically to strengthening the foundation of character education at the elementary school level.

B. Method

This study employs a quantitative approach to measure the effectiveness of EMC2 social-emotional attitudes (Empathy, Care, Compassion, and Critical Inquiry) and their implications for the mental health of elementary school students. To achieve this goal, this study uses a one-group pretest-posttest design, which is used to evaluate changes that occur before and after program implementation. In data collection, the researcher used a questionnaire as the primary instrument to measure the extent to which the EMC2 program is effective in shaping social-emotional attitudes and strengthening students' mental health. This questionnaire serves as an evaluation tool to measure the effectiveness of the program in developing social-emotional attitudes and supporting students' mental health. This research activity can help identify the extent of students' social and emotional development, as this aspect is considered key to the effectiveness of learning.

Data was collected through a questionnaire completed by 23 respondents using a Likert scale to measure students' social-emotional aspects. Interview respondents were selected purposively based on several criteria, such as full participation in the EMC² program, significant changes in questionnaire scores, and demonstrating social-emotional dynamics during the activity. Three respondents were selected as they were deemed capable of representing variations in student experiences and providing in-depth qualitative data. This number aligns with the principle of data saturation in descriptive qualitative studies, as the focus of the interviews is to explore students' perceptions of the impact of the EMC² program on their mental health. Each respondent will be assigned an identification code: A1 for Respondent 1, A2 for Respondent 2, and A3 for Respondent 3. Furthermore, the data obtained through the interviews will be analyzed using coding techniques to identify the main themes that reflect students' experiences and perceptions of the implementation of the EMC² social-emotional attitude and its impact on mental health at the elementary school level.

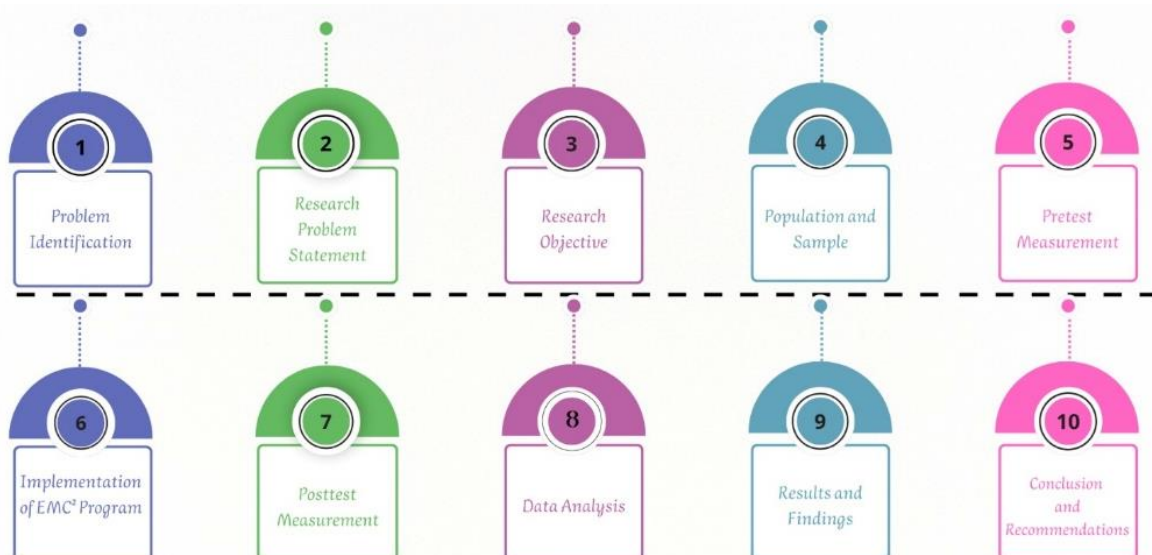


Figure 1. Research Design Flow

C. Result

Before collecting the primary data, a validity test was conducted on the questionnaire instrument to ensure that each statement item had adequate ability to measure the social-emotional aspects of elementary school students. The validity test was conducted on the questionnaire instrument used to measure social-emotional attitudes toward students' mental health. The instrument consisted of 20 statements and was tested on pretest data (stage 1) and posttest data (stage 2). Nine statements were found to be valid in both stages; therefore, only these nine items were used for further analysis to ensure more accurate and consistent research results.

After validation, the instrument's reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha technique to assess internal consistency. The results showed that all instruments were reliable, with Cronbach's Alpha values for the social-emotional attitude variable (X) of 0.648 in the pretest and 0.789 in the posttest. Meanwhile, the mental health variable (Y) showed reliability values of 0.708 in the pretest and 0.817 in the posttest. Based on the general interpretation of Cronbach's Alpha values, values above 0.6 indicate adequate reliability, and values above 0.7 indicate good reliability. The following table summarizes the reliability test results:

Table 1. Pretest and Posttest Reliability Test Results

Variable	Stage	Number of Valid Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Description
Social Emotional Attitude (X)	Pretest	4	0.648	Reliable
	Posttest	7	0.789	Reliable
Mental Health (Y)	Pretest	5	0.708	Reliable
	Posttest	7	0.817	Reliable

Next, a normality test was conducted to determine the type of statistical test used in analyzing the effectiveness of the EMC² program. This test used the Shapiro-Wilk method on the pretest and posttest scores because the number of respondents was less than 50. The results of the normality test showed that the four variables analyzed, namely the pretest and posttest on the EMC² social-emotional attitude variable (X) and the pretest and posttest on the Mental Health variable (Y), had significance values (Sig.) greater than 0.05. This indicates that the data is usually distributed. The following is a summary of the normality test results.

Table 2. Normality Test Result (Shapiro-Wilk)

Variable	Stage	Sig. (p-value)	Distribution
Social Emotional Attitude (X)	Pretest	0.069	Normal
	Posttest	0.081	Normal
Mental Health (Y)	Pretest	0.109	Normal
	Posttest	0.938	Normal

After confirming that the data were normally distributed, the effectiveness of the EMC² program on students' mental health was tested using a paired sample t-test. This test aimed to determine whether there was a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores of the same group of students. The following is a summary of the results of the paired sample t-test:

Table 3. Test Results Table Paired Sample T-test (Pretest and Posttest)

Statistic	Pretest	Posttest
Mean (Average)	30,30	37,43
Std. Deviation	6,413	6,953
Std. Error Mean	1,337	1,450

Table 4. Table Parameters for Paired Sample t-Test

T-test parameter	Value
Mean Difference	-7,130
Standard Deviation of Difference (Std. Deviation)	9,503
Error Mean Standard	1,981
Confidence interval 95% (Lower - Upper)	-11,240 - -3,021
Value t (t-value)	-3,599
Degree of freedom (df)	22
Significance (Sig. 2-tailed)	0,002

The results of the statistical analysis show that the average pretest score was 30.30 with a standard deviation of 6.413, while the average posttest score increased to 37.43 with a standard deviation of 6.953. This indicates an improvement in students' mental health scores after participating in the EMC² program. The difference between the pretest and posttest averages was 7.13 points.

Based on the results of the Paired Sample t-Test, a t-value of -3.599 was obtained with a degree of freedom (df) of 22, and a significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.002. Since the significance value is less than 0.05, there is a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores. Thus, the EMC² program is deemed effective in improving the mental health of elementary school students.

These test results are supported by data obtained through in-depth interviews with three students as informants. Respondent A1 stated that, after participating in the EMC² program, they became more capable of controlling their emotions, saying: "I find it easier to control my anger and feel calmer when interacting with friends." Respondent A2 also experienced positive changes in self-confidence and social interaction: "I feel more confident and find it easier to make friends with classmates after participating in this activity." Meanwhile, Respondent A3 stated that the program made them feel valued and supported: "This activity made me feel important and supported, so I feel happier and more comfortable at school."

This indicates that the EMC² program not only impacts quantitative metrics or scores but also tangibly strengthens students' social-emotional aspects. Overall, the results of this study suggest that the EMC² program is effective in enhancing students' social-emotional skills, including empathy, self-awareness, kindness, and critical thinking. These four aspects positively contribute to the mental stability of elementary school students.

D. Discussion

This study aims to determine the effectiveness of the EMC² (Empathy, Mindfulness, Compassion, and Critical Inquiry) program in supporting the mental health of elementary school students by strengthening their social-emotional attitudes. This discussion focuses on answering the research questions, explaining the data collection process, interpreting the results, linking the findings to existing theories, and contributing to the development of theory.

Before conducting the effectiveness test, the researcher first ensured that the instruments used met the validity and reliability requirements. The validity test results showed that most of the statements in the questionnaire were valid, both in the pretest and posttest, indicating that the instruments accurately measured the social-emotional constructs and mental health of students.

The validity test results showed that most of the statements in the questionnaire were valid, both in the pretest and posttest, indicating that the instrument accurately measured students' social-emotional and mental health constructs. Additionally, the reliability test results indicated that all variables had values classified as Reliable. The reliability value even increased from the pretest to the posttest, indicating that the internal consistency between items became stronger after students participated in the EMC² program. The normality test, conducted using the Shapiro-Wilk test, showed that all variables, both pretest and posttest, related to social-emotional attitude and mental health, were normally distributed (significance value > 0.05). Therefore, the researcher used a paired sample t-test to determine whether there was a significant difference between the pretest and posttest values of students after participating in the EMC² program.

The results of the paired sample t-test showed a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores. The average pretest score of 30.30 increased to 37.43 on the posttest. The average difference value was -7.130 with a t-value of -3.599 and a significance level of 0.002 ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that there was a significant improvement in students' mental health after receiving the EMC² program intervention. This means that the program has proven effective in creating positive changes in students' psychological well-being, particularly in terms of emotional regulation, self-awareness, and the ability to understand and express feelings healthily.

The effectiveness of the EMC² program is further supported by qualitative findings from in-depth interviews with three selected respondents. All three reported positive changes in terms of emotional regulation, increased self-confidence, and a sense of being valued and accepted in the school environment. Respondent A1 stated that they became

calmer in handling conflicts, A2 felt more comfortable socializing with their peers, and A3 admitted to feeling more cared for and at ease in the classroom. These findings indicate that the EMC² approach not only influences students' cognitive aspects but also has a lasting emotional impact on their daily social interactions.

In the context of character education theory and social-emotional learning (SEL), the results of this study reinforce previous findings, as highlighted by [Avandra et al \(2023\)](#) about the importance of PSE in increasing learning motivation, as well as by [Mulyawati et al \(2022\)](#) regarding the influence of empathy on prosocial behavior. This study also supports the approach that character education should begin at an early age and be implemented holistically, involving various stakeholders such as teachers, parents, and the broader school community.

Although this study does not explicitly generate new theories, it has successfully modified existing approaches by demonstrating that the simultaneous integration of the four components of EMC² can yield significant results in the context of elementary education. This approach can be further developed as an applicable social-emotional intervention model in elementary schools.

This confirms that the EMC² program is not only relevant in the framework of character education but also important as a preventive measure in maintaining students' mental health. The success of this program relies on ongoing support from teachers, schools, and parents to reinforce the social-emotional skills that have been developed. The collaborative efforts of all parties will amplify the positive impact of the program and help create a healthy and resilient educational environment that supports children's future development.

E. Implication

The results of this study have significant implications for character education and mental health in the primary education context. The EMC² Social Emotional Attitude Program, which includes the elements of Empathy, Mindfulness, Compassion, and Critical Inquiry, has been proven to improve students' mental health, particularly in terms of emotional management, self-confidence, and the quality of social interactions.

From an academic perspective, these findings support and reinforce the theory of social-emotional learning (SEL), which posits that the development of social and emotional skills is a crucial foundation for academic success and students' mental well-being. Additionally, the EMC² approach contributes to innovation in the design of character education curricula in a more integrated and contextual manner.

Another implication is the need to widely adopt a similar approach in elementary schools in Indonesia as part of a systemic intervention to improve children's mental health from an early age. These findings also present opportunities for the development of teacher training programs that focus on the application of EMC²-based social-emotional strategies in daily learning.

Thus, this research not only strengthens the theoretical understanding of the importance of character education and mental health at the elementary level but also provides practical contributions to the development of policies and learning strategies that are more responsive to students' psychosocial needs.

F. Limitation and Suggestion for Further Research

This study has several limitations. First, the number of participants was limited to 23 students from one elementary school, so the results cannot be generalized. Second, the approach used was descriptive and quantitative, incorporating interviews; however, it was not accompanied by monitoring over a specific period, so the sustainable impact of the EMC² program cannot yet be determined. Third, data was only collected from the students' perspective, without involving teachers and parents, who also play important roles.

For future research, it is recommended to involve more schools with diverse backgrounds, conduct ongoing monitoring to assess long-term effects, and collaborate with teachers, parents, and counselors to obtain a more comprehensive perspective. Additionally, the development of more varied and valid instruments is needed to strengthen the reliability of the data. As a result, future research outcomes are expected to be more robust methodologically and have a broader impact on the development of mental health programs in elementary schools.

G. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the implementation of the EMC² Social Emotional Attitude program, which encompasses empathy, mindfulness, compassion, and critical inquiry, is effective in enhancing the mental health of elementary school students. Statistical analysis using the paired sample t-test indicates a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores, suggesting improvements in emotional regulation, self-confidence, and the quality of social interactions among students after participating in the program. These findings are also supported by in-depth interviews, which reveal positive changes in students' emotional and social aspects, such as feeling valued, calmer, and more easily able to get along with others.

Overall, the EMC² program not only plays a role in character development but also has a significant impact on students' psychological well-being. This reinforces the importance of integrating social-emotional learning into elementary education as a preventive measure to maintain students' mental health. Therefore, ongoing collaboration between teachers, schools, and families is essential to strengthen and maintain the positive results achieved from this program.

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