

Emotional Literacy In An Era Of Anxiety: Integration Of Mental Health Into The Elementary School Curriculum

Amalia Tasya

Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia

E-mail:

Amaliatasya2001@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Entered : June 07, 2025 Revised : July 20, 2025 Accepted : August 25, 2025 Published : August 30, 2025	This study aims to explore the implementation of emotional literacy and mental health integration in the elementary school curriculum, focusing on their impact on children's social, emotional, and academic development. The study was conducted at SD Negeri 10 Makassar using a qualitative approach using a case study design. Data were collected through interviews with the principal, teachers, and students, as well as direct observation of the implementation of emotional literacy and mental health. The results indicate that although there have been efforts to introduce emotional literacy, its implementation is still limited to ad-hoc activities and has not been systematically integrated into the curriculum. Mental health integration is also still responsive to emerging problems, rather than structured prevention. Some challenges faced include limited time within the curriculum, lack of training for teachers, and stigma surrounding mental health issues. However, there is significant potential to improve this education system with better training support for teachers and a change in school culture that is more open to mental health issues. This research is expected to contribute to the development of a more holistic curriculum, one that focuses not only on academic achievement but also on students' emotional and psychological well-being.
Keywords: <i>Emotional Literacy, Mental Health, Elementary School Curriculum, Character Education, Social-Emotional Development.</i>	

INTRODUCTION

Children's mental health challenges in the modern era are increasing, with factors such as social media exposure, academic pressure, and social and economic changes contributing to rising levels of anxiety, stress, and depression in children from an early age. These issues can have long-term impacts on their psychological development if not properly addressed (Courbet et al., 2024). The prevalence of mental disorders in children and adolescents continues to rise, posing a significant public health challenge with significant social and economic impacts (Yan et al., 2022). Children who struggle with emotion regulation and are exposed to academic pressure and social media are at higher



How to cite:

Tasya A (2025) Emotional Literacy In An Era Of Anxiety: Integration Of Mental Health Into The Elementary School Curriculum, 2(2), 34-44. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62872/709r9336>

risk of developing emotional problems such as anxiety and depression (Tajik-Parvinchi et al., 2021). Emotional literacy, which encompasses the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own and others' emotions, has been shown to be effective in reducing emotional and behavioral problems in children. Emotional literacy programs in schools can increase emotional knowledge and encourage help-seeking behaviors in children aged 8–10 (Calear et al., 2024). Furthermore, mindfulness-based interventions and social-emotional learning can reduce emotional problems in preschool children, especially in at-risk groups (Courbet et al., 2024). Therefore, integrating emotional literacy into the elementary school curriculum is crucial to support children's mental health from an early age (Tolan et al., 2024).

Emotional literacy refers to the ability to recognize, understand, manage, and express emotions in a healthy manner. It encompasses the skills of understanding one's own and others' feelings, as well as reflecting on the impact of emotions on thoughts and behavior. Furthermore, emotional literacy also involves the ability to talk about feelings, seek help when needed, and use healthy emotion regulation strategies (Hoyos, 2021; Penfold, 2022). Emotional literacy is crucial for children's development, including social, emotional, and mental health. Children who are able to recognize and manage their emotions well tend to be more adaptable in social environments and have positive relationships with peers and adults (Sánchez-Núñez et al., 2020). Emotional literacy programs in schools have been shown to increase emotional knowledge, reduce stigma, and encourage help-seeking behavior, thus contributing to the prevention of mental health problems. Furthermore, children with good emotional literacy tend to have lower levels of anxiety, stress, and depression, and are better able to cope with life's stresses (Galyautdinova et al., 2022). Emotional literacy also helps shape children's character, such as self-confidence, resilience to stress, and healthy decision-making. Therefore, emotional literacy plays a crucial role in maintaining children's psychological well-being, strengthening social relationships, and supporting the management of anxiety and risky behaviors.

The current elementary school curriculum places a heavy emphasis on academic achievement, often neglecting mental and emotional health. This over-focus on grades and exam results neglects students' need to develop essential social and emotional skills to support their mental health (Li, 2022; Liu et al., 2024). This exacerbates the challenges students face in adapting to high academic demands and increasingly complex social environments, which can trigger stress and mental disorders (Minsih et al., 2025; Kakunje, 2023). The limited teaching of social and emotional skills in the formal curriculum places an additional burden on both students and teachers, as time that should be devoted to mental health and life skills education is often diverted to core subjects that focus more on grades. Furthermore, teachers often lack specific training in emotional literacy and mental health, leaving them ill-equipped to recognize and address these issues. The persistent stigma surrounding mental health issues among teachers and the community further exacerbates this situation (Sadler et al., 2024; Kakunje, 2023). Therefore, integrating mental health education into the elementary school curriculum, along with emotional literacy training for teachers, is a crucial step in creating a learning environment that comprehensively supports students' mental health (Loose et al., 2023).

Integrating emotional literacy and mental health education into the elementary school curriculum is crucial for providing children with better life skills. Curricula that focus too much on academic achievement often neglect children's emotional and social needs, even though mental health is a key foundation for their academic, social, and character development (Minsih et al., 2025; Dewa et al., 2025). Emotional literacy helps children recognize, understand, and manage emotions, preparing them to cope with stress, build positive relationships, and overcome life's challenges in an era of anxiety (Sari et al., 2025). Studies show that integrating mental health literacy, stress management techniques, and social-emotional learning (SEL) into the school curriculum significantly increases emotional resilience, reduces academic stress, and builds positive interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, mental health-based activities such as morning discussions and innovative games have been shown to improve students' psychological well-being as well as their social and academic skills. Mental health education also supports the development of important life skills such as communication, cooperation, resilience, and empathy which are much needed in the era of globalization and digitalization (Sharma, 2024; Yu, et al., 2024; Cheng & Tasnaina, 2025).

The purpose of this study is to explore the importance of integrating emotional literacy and mental health education into the elementary school curriculum, with a focus on its impact on children's social, emotional, and academic development. This study aims to analyze how emotional literacy can help children recognize, understand, and manage emotions, as well as reduce the negative impact of stress and anxiety that often arise in today's stressful modern era. Furthermore, this study also aims to evaluate the effectiveness of integrating mental health education in building life skills such as resilience, empathy, and communication skills among elementary school students. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the development of a more holistic educational curriculum that is responsive to students' emotional needs. By highlighting the importance of emotional literacy, this study can provide recommendations for more inclusive educational policies, which focus not only on academic achievement but also on students' psychological well-being. The results of this study are expected to encourage schools to systematically integrate mental health education, thereby creating a learning environment that supports students' holistic growth and development.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore in-depth the implementation of emotional literacy and mental health integration in the elementary school curriculum. Qualitative methods were chosen because they allow researchers to understand the phenomenon holistically by utilizing in-depth interviews and direct observations. In accordance with the approach described by Sugiyono (2019), data were collected through semi-structured interviews involving one principal, three teachers, and two sixth-grade students at SD Negeri 10 Makassar. This interview technique was designed to obtain diverse perspectives on emotional literacy, its application in the curriculum, and the challenges faced by educators in integrating mental health aspects. In addition to interviews, observations were conducted to determine how the existing curriculum interacts with the development of emotional literacy and students' mental health. The data obtained were analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques

with steps such as data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions to provide a comprehensive understanding of emotional literacy practices in elementary schools. This study refers to the theories and methods proposed by Sugiyono (2019) that are relevant to the objectives of this study.

Table 1. Research Sources

No	Name	Age	Position
1	Drs. H. Fadli Hadi	52	Headmaster
2	Mrs. Nurul Fadila	35	Grade 6 Teacher
3	Mr. Ahmad Suryadi	40	Physical Education Teacher
4	Mrs. Rahmawati	30	Indonesian Language Teacher
5	Budi Santoso	12	6th Grade Students
6	Laila Siti	12	6th Grade Students

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to explore the implementation of emotional literacy and mental health integration in the elementary school curriculum at SD Negeri 10 Makassar. Based on interviews with various sources and observations conducted during the study, various findings illustrate how emotional literacy and mental health are integrated into the learning process at this school.

1. Implementation of Emotional Literacy in Elementary Schools

Emotional literacy at State Elementary School 10 Makassar has begun to be introduced into daily learning, although it is not yet fully structured into the curriculum. Drs. H. Fadli Hadi, the school principal, explained that this effort begins with habituating it in daily activities.

"We try to instill character and emotional values in every subject. Emotional literacy isn't just about recognizing feelings, but also about how students can manage their emotions in interactions with their peers and those around them," he said.

This shows that although emotional literacy has not been fully integrated, efforts to introduce the concept have begun.

Ms. Nurul Fadila, a Grade 6 teacher, added that in her class, they held activities that allowed students to recognize and express their feelings.

"We engage students in group discussions about feelings and how to deal with them. We teach students to talk about their feelings, not to suppress or hide them," she said.

This shows that teachers play an important role in introducing emotional literacy even though there is no formal curriculum that regulates this.

Despite efforts to introduce emotional literacy, some challenges remain. Ahmad Suryadi, a physical education teacher, said that they often focus too much on the physical aspects of physical education.

"On several occasions, we also provide training that emphasizes cooperation, positive emotions, and self-resilience. However, there is no formally structured program within the curriculum yet," he said.

This indicates that there are obstacles in integrating emotional literacy into all subjects systematically.

2. Integration of Mental Health in the Curriculum

In addition to emotional literacy, the integration of mental health into the curriculum at SD Negeri 10 Makassar is also a focus, although still limited. Drs. H. Fadli Hadi explained that they are beginning to move towards an understanding of mental health, but most of the programs are reactive.

"We usually only focus on mental health when a problem arises, such as a student experiencing anxiety or severe stress. We don't have a specific program to prevent mental health issues early," he said.

This shows that despite awareness of the importance of mental health, there is no structured program to address this issue proactively.

Ms. Rahmawati, an Indonesian language teacher, also stated that they often see students who have difficulty managing their emotions, especially when facing exams or academic pressure.

"We try to provide an understanding of how to manage anxiety, but that's not enough without more in-depth formal learning," he said.

This shows that although some efforts are made to introduce students to the importance of mental health, the support provided is still limited and focuses more on dealing with problems that have already occurred, rather than prevention.

Students also shared their experiences with emotional literacy and mental health at school. Budi Santoso, a 6th-grade student, said,

"Sometimes I feel anxious before a test, but the teacher told me to stay calm and focused. It's helped me learn how to not panic."

Laila Siti, another student, added,

"I learned in school to speak up when I feel sad or angry, so I don't keep my feelings to myself."

These two students showed that they had gained an understanding of how to manage feelings, although their application was still limited to certain activities.

3. Challenges in Integrating Emotional Literacy and Mental Health

Interviews with various sources revealed several key challenges in integrating emotional literacy and mental health into the curriculum at Makassar State Elementary School 10. One of the main challenges is limited time and resources. Ms. Nurul Fadila explained,

"Due to our busy schedule, we can only hold activities that touch on emotions. Our curriculum focuses more on core subjects."

This suggests that limited time to teach social and emotional skills is a major barrier to the comprehensive integration of emotional literacy.

The lack of training for teachers in dealing with mental health issues is also a significant challenge. Mr. Ahmad Suryadi said, "We need specific training in dealing with students' anxiety and emotional problems. We feel ill-equipped to help them further." More in-depth training on how to address students' mental health issues is urgently needed to facilitate more effective teaching in emotional literacy and mental health.

Discussion

1. Implementation of Emotional Literacy in Elementary Schools

The implementation of emotional literacy in elementary schools is a crucial step to ensure that children have the skills to manage their emotions amidst increasingly complex social and academic challenges. Emotional literacy not only helps students recognize and manage their feelings but also plays a crucial role in building healthy social relationships. However, in reality, the implementation of emotional literacy at SD Negeri 10 Makassar remains limited. While teachers are well aware of the importance of emotional literacy, its implementation is not fully integrated into the formal curriculum. Activities such as class discussions, which aim to encourage students to talk about their feelings and manage anxiety, are often conducted ad hoc rather than as part of a structured curriculum.

The biggest challenge in implementing emotional literacy is the lack of time in the curriculum to focus on things outside of academic subjects. Much of school time is still focused on academic achievement, resulting in the neglect of students' social and emotional skills. Therefore, although teachers try to integrate emotional literacy into daily learning, these activities are often limited to specific moments and do not become an integral part of the teaching and learning process. Implementing emotional literacy requires ongoing effort, where students are given opportunities to practice recognizing and managing their emotions in a variety of situations, not just when problems arise.

There are also gaps in teacher training regarding emotional literacy. While some teachers demonstrate a commitment to developing these skills in their students, they often feel unprepared and lack adequate training to recognize and address deeper mental health issues. This lack of training makes it difficult for teachers to respond appropriately when students exhibit signs of anxiety or emotional difficulties. Therefore, greater investment in teacher training is needed to enhance their ability to provide appropriate support to students (Sharma, 2024; Yu et al., 2024).

2. Integration of Mental Health in the Curriculum

Integrating mental health into the elementary school curriculum is a crucial step amidst the emotional challenges children face in this modern era. Poor mental health can impact students' academic, social, and personal development, which in turn impacts their performance and well-being at school. However, the integration of mental health into the curriculum at SD Negeri 10 Makassar is still in its early stages and not yet fully systematic. Some existing programs, such as mindfulness-based activities and discussion sessions on stress management, are more ad-hoc and not well-structured within the broader curriculum.

The primary focus in this school remains on academic achievement, and while teachers attempt to introduce mental health concepts, this is often more a response to existing issues than a planned part of the curriculum. Furthermore, mental health-related activities are not always taught in an integrated manner with other subjects. Activities such as morning discussions and innovative games involving self-reflection and emotional regulation, while beneficial, remain limited to specific activities and have not yet become part of students' daily lives.

There is significant potential to increase the integration of mental health into the curriculum, particularly given the growing understanding of the importance of stress and anxiety management for students. When implemented systematically, social-emotional learning (SEL) programs can significantly contribute to the development of students' life skills, such as empathy, collaboration, and effective communication. By involving parents and the community in mental health education, schools can create a more supportive and responsive environment to students' emotional needs. Mental health education in elementary schools not only teaches coping skills but also provides students with the tools to recognize early signs of emotional distress and seek help when needed (Tolan et al., 2024; Loose et al., 2023).

3. Challenges in Integrating Emotional Literacy and Mental Health

Integrating emotional literacy and mental health education into the elementary school curriculum faces several challenges that must be overcome to be effective. One of the biggest challenges is the limited time available within the curriculum. A significant portion of school time is still dedicated to academic subjects, leaving little room for activities focused on developing social and emotional skills. Teachers at SD Negeri 10 Makassar often feel they don't have enough time to devote adequate attention to students' mental health without compromising other core subjects. Therefore, despite good intentions to implement emotional literacy and mental health, their integration into the curriculum is often hampered by time constraints (Sadler et al., 2024).

There are also challenges related to limited resources and training available to teachers. Many teachers acknowledge that they lack adequate training in emotional literacy and mental health. Without adequate training, teachers struggle to recognize early signs of emotional or mental health issues in students and provide appropriate support. Furthermore, these resource limitations also include a lack of relevant learning materials on emotional literacy that teachers can use in their daily activities. In this regard, the availability of more structured teaching materials on emotional management and mental health is essential to support the implementation of a more holistic curriculum (Minsih et al., 2025; Kakunje, 2023).

Another challenge is the persistent stigma surrounding mental health issues within the school community. Many parents, teachers, and even students are reluctant to discuss emotional or mental health issues openly because they are considered taboo. This stigma prevents students from expressing their feelings or seeking help when they encounter emotional challenges. Therefore, it is crucial to change this paradigm by educating the school community about the importance of talking about mental health and providing a space for students to feel safe expressing their feelings (Yan et al., 2022). Limited access to mental health professionals in schools is also a significant issue. In many elementary schools, particularly in low-resource areas, there are very few school psychologists or counselors. This limits schools' ability to provide adequate psychological support to students who need special attention. Therefore, the government needs to provide more support to schools in the form of teacher training and the provision of professionals who can address mental health issues more comprehensively. With these steps, the integration of emotional literacy and mental health into the elementary school curriculum will be more effective in creating a mentally and emotionally healthy learning environment (Sharma, 2024; Yu, et al., 2024).

The implementation of emotional literacy and mental health in the elementary school curriculum still faces various challenges, but there is significant potential to improve this education system with stronger support from various parties. Strengthening teacher training, increasing resources, and changing school culture to be more open to mental health issues will enable this integration to run more smoothly. Over time, with the development of a more inclusive curriculum that is responsive to students' emotional needs, it is hoped that a learning environment that better supports students' holistic development, both academically and emotionally, will be created.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study indicates that the implementation of emotional literacy and mental health integration in the elementary school curriculum has significant potential to improve students' psychological well-being and support their social and academic development. However, this implementation still faces various challenges,

primarily related to time constraints in a curriculum that is primarily focused on academic achievement. Furthermore, limited teacher training on emotional literacy and mental health, along with the persistent stigma surrounding emotional issues within the school community, hinder effective implementation. While teachers have attempted to integrate emotional literacy and mental health activities, these activities remain ad-hoc and unsystematic within the existing curriculum. Therefore, to create a learning environment that supports students' emotional and psychological development, more structured and systematic integration within the curriculum is needed, as well as further training for teachers to enhance their preparedness to face these challenges. With a shift in school culture toward greater openness to mental health issues, it is hoped that emotional literacy can develop more optimally and make a significant contribution to the holistic development of elementary school students. This effort also requires support from all parties, including the government, to provide adequate resources and professionals who can address mental health issues more comprehensively.

LITERATURE

- Calear, A., Macleod, E., Hoyer, A., McCallum, S., Morse, A., Farrer, L., & Batterham, P. (2024). Pragmatic controlled trial of a school-based emotion literacy program for 8- to 10-year-old children: study protocol. *BMC Psychiatry*, 24. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-024-05628-z>.
- Cheng, Y., & Tasnaina, N. (2025). Developing an Integration of Sports and Health Teaching Programs to Improve the Physical and Mental Health of Primary School Students. *International Journal of Sociologies and Anthropologies Science Reviews*. <https://doi.org/10.60027/ijssar.2025.4784>.
- Courbet, O., Daviot, Q., Kalamarides, V., Habib, M., & Villemonteix, T. (2024). Promoting Psychological Well-being in Preschoolers Through Mindfulness-based Socio-emotional Learning: A Randomized-controlled Trial.. *Research on child and adolescent psychopathology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10802-024-01220-x>.
- Dewa, I., Eka, A., Dharma, P., Suharta, G., Widiana, W., & Lasmawan, W. (2025). EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY CURRICULUM TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' MENTAL WELL-BEING IN SCHOOLS. *Prima Magistra: Jurnal Ilmiah Kependidikan*. <https://doi.org/10.37478/jpm.v6i2.5032>.
- Galyautdinova, S., Khukhrin, M., & Chuikova, T. (2022). Studying the relationship between mental health literacy and emotional state among young people in Republic of Bashkortostan. *European Psychiatry*, 65, S691 - S691. <https://doi.org/10.1192/j.eurpsy.2022.1778>.
- Hoyos, H. (2021). Emotional Literacy in the Education Context. , 65-69. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003083139-12>.
- Kakunje, A. (2023). Mental health education integration into the school curriculum needs to be implemented. *Archives of Medicine and Health Sciences*, 11, 1 - 2. <https://doi.org/10.4103/amhs.amhs.13123>.
- Li, D. (2022). Music Therapy in Mental Health and Emotional Diversion of Primary and Secondary School Students. *Occupational Therapy International*, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/8370682>.
- Liu, S., Jie, S., & Yu, X. (2024). The use of digital teaching resources in teaching mental health in elementary school. *International Journal of New Developments in Education*. <https://doi.org/10.25236/ijnede.2024.060423>.

- Loose, T., Côté, S., Malboeuf-Hurtubise, C., Beaudet, J., Lessard, G., Chadi, N., Gauvin, L., Morin, I., & Geoffroy, M. (2023). Protocol for the Open Sky School: a two-arm clustered randomized controlled trial to test the effectiveness of a nature-based intervention on mental health of elementary school children. *BMC Public Health*, 23. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-15033-y>.
- Minsih, M., Destya, A., Alfi, L., Yasin, M., Mujahid, I., & Helzi, H. (2025). Building Bright Minds: A Comprehensive Study on Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Enhancing Elementary Students' Mental Health. *Salud, Ciencia y Tecnología*. <https://doi.org/10.56294/saludcyt20251085>.
- Penfold, S. (2022). What is emotional literacy?. *Early Years Educator*. <https://doi.org/10.12968/eyed.2022.23.9.34>.
- Sadler, D., McCaughey, D., Metcalfe, A., Milaney, K., & Ronksley, P. (2024). Teaching Mental Health in the Classroom: A Mixed-Methods Implementation Evaluation of a Mental Health Literacy Program in Elementary Schools. *Mental Health & Prevention*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mhp.2024.200377>.
- Sánchez-Núñez, M., García-Rubio, N., Fernández-Berrocal, P., & Latorre, J. (2020). Emotional Intelligence and Mental Health in the Family: The Influence of Emotional Intelligence Perceived by Parents and Children. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17176255>.
- Sari, K., Mundiri, A., & Adeoye, M. (2025). Creating New Spaces That Foster Students' Emotional Well-Being; Breakthrough Strategies in Curriculum Management Based on Mental Health. *Nidhomul Haq : Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*. <https://doi.org/10.31538/ndhq.v10i1.118>.
- Sharma, S. (2024). Examining the Integration of Mental Health Awareness in Curriculum Design: A Policy and Practice Perspective. *African Journal of Biomedical Research*. <https://doi.org/10.53555/ajbr.v27i4s.5549>.
- Sugiyono, (2019). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D*. Bandung: Alfabeta.
- Tajik-Parvinchi, D., Farmus, L., Modica, P., Cribbie, R., & Weiss, J. (2021). The Role of Cognitive Control and Emotion Regulation in Predicting Mental Health Problems in Children with Neurodevelopmental Disorders.. *Child: care, health and development*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cch.12868>.
- Tolan, P., Harris, A., Burchinal, M., & Jennings, P. (2024). Promoting 21st Century Health and Wellness Skills in Elementary School Children: a Group Randomized Trial. *Prevention Science*, 25, 919 - 933. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-024-01717-3>.
- Yan, K., Anderson, J., & Burn, A. (2022). Review: School-based interventions to improve mental health literacy and reduce mental health stigma - a systematic review.. *Child and adolescent mental health*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/camh.12543>.
- Yu, T., Xu, J., Jiang, Y., Hua, H., Zhou, Y., & Guo, X. (2022). School educational models and child mental health among K-12 students: a scoping review. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, 16. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13034-022-00469-8>

