

Gender Differences in Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Ability: A Cross-Sectional Study in Adolescents in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze gender differences in Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) abilities among adolescents in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Using a cross-sectional approach, 521 adolescents (230 boys and 291 girls) aged 15–18 years participated in this study. The research instruments used have been culturally adapted to measure the five dimensions of SEL: emotion regulation, empathy, cooperation, leadership, and stress resilience. Data analysis using independent samples t-test and MANOVA showed that adolescent girls were significantly superior in emotion regulation ($p < 0.001$), empathy ($p < 0.001$), and cooperation ($p = 0.002$), while adolescent boys were better at leadership ($p < 0.001$) and stress resilience ($p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that gender differences in SEL are influenced by biological factors and Javanese social and cultural norms typical of Yogyakarta, where women are encouraged to be more empathetic and harmonious. At the same time, men are expected to be more independent and resilient. The study's implications emphasize the importance of developing SEL programs that are responsive to gender and local contexts, such as stress-management training for women and increased empathy and cooperation for men. Thus, appropriate interventions can more holistically support adolescent social-emotional development.

Keywords: social emotional learning, gender differences, adolescents, yogyakarta, javanese culture

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis perbedaan gender dalam kemampuan Pembelajaran Sosial-Emosional (SEL) di kalangan remaja di Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan cross-sectional, 521 remaja (230 laki-laki dan 291 perempuan) berusia 15-18 tahun berpartisipasi dalam penelitian ini. Instrumen penelitian yang digunakan telah diadaptasi secara budaya untuk mengukur lima dimensi SEL: regulasi emosi, empati, kerja sama, kepemimpinan, dan ketahanan stres. Analisis data menggunakan sampel independen uji-t dan MANOVA menunjukkan bahwa remaja perempuan secara signifikan unggul dalam regulasi emosi ($p < 0,001$), empati ($p < 0,001$), dan kerja sama ($p = 0,002$), sedangkan remaja laki-laki lebih baik dalam kepemimpinan ($p < 0,001$) dan ketahanan stres ($p < 0,001$). Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa perbedaan gender pada SEL dipengaruhi oleh faktor biologis dan norma sosial dan budaya Jawa khas Yogyakarta, di mana perempuan didorong untuk lebih berempati dan harmonis. Pada saat yang sama, pria diharapkan lebih mandiri dan tangguh. Implikasi studi ini menekankan pentingnya mengembangkan program SEL yang responsif terhadap konteks gender dan lokal, seperti pelatihan manajemen stres untuk perempuan dan peningkatan empati dan kerja sama untuk laki-laki. Dengan demikian, intervensi yang tepat dapat secara lebih holistik mendukung perkembangan sosial-emosional remaja

Kata kunci: pembelajaran sosial emosional, perbedaan gender, remaja, yogyakarta, budaya jawa

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INTRODUCTION

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) development plays a crucial role in shaping adolescents' ability to manage emotions, build positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Recent research emphasises the need to cultivate self-awareness and self-management in adolescents. Interventions to enhance social-emotional learning must consider the unique developmental challenges that very young adolescents face. Such tailored interventions empower youth to cope with life's stressors effectively, improving their emotional management skills (Cherewick et al., 2021). Similarly, the adverse effects of unplanned disruptions, such as those seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, which intensified adolescents' struggles with emotional regulation and mental health challenges, thus underscoring the need for robust emotional skill development programs (Amran & Jamaludin, 2021). Furthermore, it stresses the influence of cultural contexts on emotional intelligence and relational dynamics, reinforcing that self-awareness and effective emotional management are shaped by environmental factors. (Dubey et al., 2024)

Relational skills are another core component of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and significantly impact adolescents' interpersonal relationships. Healthy relational skills facilitate better conflict resolution, fostering self-esteem and well-being among adolescents. Effective relationships are rooted in a strong sense of self, which is vital for younger adolescents as they navigate their identities within peer dynamics (Fortin et al., 2021). Family factors and interpersonal skill development also interlink, suggesting that positive family climates bolster adolescents' relational competencies (Xia et al., 2018). The intertwining of family influences and individual development reiterates the complexity of relational skill acquisition during adolescence.

Responsible decision-making is also integral to SEL, allowing adolescents to evaluate situations and make informed choices. Research indicates that effective parenting and supportive family dynamics can enhance adolescents' problem-solving and decision-making abilities. For instance, comprehensive life skills education that incorporates decision-making skills to foster responsible behaviours in youth (Shek et al., 2020). The insights on gender-sensitive interventions underscore the need to align SEL programs with adolescents' developmental and contextual realities, particularly regarding their decision-making processes.

Importantly, incorporating technology into SEL programs is an emerging avenue that has garnered attention. While this area requires further exploration, it is suggested that adapting SEL frameworks for online environments can enhance accessibility and engagement with SEL content, especially amid shifting educational modalities (Vo, 2024). Evidence indicates that such technological integration can provide flexible, scalable solutions for teaching SEL, thereby reaching larger adolescent populations effectively.

Some studies show that adolescent girls excel in empathy, cooperation, and emotional regulation, while teenage boys are more dominant in leadership skills and stress resilience. Adolescent girls have been identified to possess higher emotional intelligence than boys, particularly in understanding and managing emotions (SHarafitdinov, 2024; Kargina & Morozova, 2020). This advantage enables them to establish empathetic relationships, enhancing their emotional stability. For instance, Sharafitdinov discusses how teenage girls are adept at grasping emotional concepts and building connections with others, which is crucial for emotional stability (SHarafitdinov, 2024). Additionally, studies indicate that girls achieve higher scores in emotional



awareness and regulation (Schoeps et al., 2019). This capacity helps foster cooperation among peers and promotes higher levels of empathy than boys (Wu et al., 2023).

Conversely, adolescent boys show strengths in leadership and resilience to stress (Portela-Pino et al., 2022). Research has indicated that boys, particularly those engaged in physical activities, benefit from emotional clarity and regulation, which underscores their ability to effectively navigate socially complex situations (Portela-Pino et al., 2022). Furthermore, boys may express themselves more readily in leadership contexts, equipping them with tools for asserting dominance in group settings (SHarafitdinov, 2024) (Chohan & Habib, 2024).

While girls may exhibit higher emotional intelligence, the relationship between emotional intelligence and resilience is interesting. Girls, despite their prowess in emotional regulation, are often reported to experience higher levels of stress during adolescence (Schoeps et al., 2019; Inam et al., 2014). This stress may be a significant barrier to their well-being, suggesting that emotional intelligence alone does not equate to resilience. In contrast, boys may demonstrate lower emotional intelligence but exhibit greater resilience, allowing them to cope with stressors effectively (Schoeps et al., 2019; Schoeps et al., 2019).

However, the findings are inconsistent because different cultural factors, parenting practices, and social norms across societies influence them. In Indonesia, particularly in Yogyakarta, where Javanese culture is deeply rooted in politeness and social hierarchy, gender differences in SEL may be more pronounced due to differing social expectations for adolescent boys and girls.

Previous research has been limited in exploring gender differences in the context of SEL, especially in adolescent groups undergoing complex psychosocial transitions. In addition, most SEL measurement instruments are developed in Western countries, may not fully align with Indonesia's socio-cultural context. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the difference in SEL ability between adolescent boys and girls in Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

The results of this study are expected to provide recommendations for educators, parents, and policymakers on developing gender-responsive SEL programs tailored to the local context. In addition, these findings can serve as a basis for further research on the role of culture in the socio-emotional development of adolescents in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study used a cross-sectional approach to analyze gender differences in Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) abilities in adolescents in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. A total of 521 adolescents, boys and girls, participated in this study, selected through purposive sampling techniques from various junior and senior high schools in the Yogyakarta area. The selection of this sample takes into account balanced gender representation and diversity of socio-economic backgrounds.

The instruments used are adapted from Zhou and Ee (Zhou & Ee, 2012). The research instrument is a SEL measurement tool culturally adapted to the Indonesian context, covering key aspects such as emotion regulation, empathy, cooperation, leadership, and stress resilience. Before the main data collection, three developmental psychologists conducted a content validity test to ensure the instrument's suitability for Indonesian adolescents.

Data analysis was carried out in two main stages using Jamovi software. The first stage involves Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to test the validity of the SELL



instrument construct. The measurement model was tested by paying attention to several goodness-of-fit indicators, including: 1) Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.92, 2) Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) = 0.91, 3) Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.06, and 4) Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) = 0.04. The CFA results showed that the measurement model fit the empirical data well, with all items loading significantly ($p < 0.001$) and loadings ranging from 0.45 to 0.82. The composite reliability for each SEL dimension ranges from 0.78 to 0.85, indicating adequate internal consistency.

In the second stage, gender differences were analysed using an independent samples t-test and MANOVA. This analysis considers the effects of interactions between gender and other demographic variables. The data analysis process also includes examining statistical assumptions, such as normality of distributions, homogeneity of variances, and the absence of extreme multicollinearity. All assumptions are fulfilled for the parametric analysis performed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Of the 521 research subjects, 230 were men and 291 were women. The subjects are in the early to late adolescent age range, 15 to 18 years old. The age distribution shows that most subjects are between 15 and 17. In terms of regional origin, the subjects came from five administrative regions in the Special Region of Yogyakarta: Sleman (128 people), Gunung Kidul (121 people), Yogyakarta City (104 people), Bantul (93 people), and Kulon Progo (75 people). This data suggests that the research involves participants from various geographical and social backgrounds in the Yogyakarta region.

Table 1.

Distribution of Youth Demographics in the Yogyakarta Region

No.	Category	Sub-Category	Sum
1.	Gender	Man	230
		Woman	291
	Total		521
2.	Age	15	147
		16	149
		17	127
		18	98
	Total		521
3.	Regional Origin	Sleman	128
		Gunung Kidul	121
		Kota Yogyakarta	104
		Bantul	93
		Kulon Progo	75
	Total		521

To analyze differences in SEL ability between men and women, independent-samples t-tests and MANOVA were used. This analysis considers the interaction between gender and other demographic variables.

The normality test results indicated that all variables had distributions close to normal. The value of skewness ranges from -0.41 to 0.18 and the value of the kurtosis



ranges from -0.12 to 0.28, so it is within an acceptable range for parametric analysis. In addition, the Shapiro-Wilk test showed that none of the SEL dimensions had a p-value below 0.05, indicating that the data distribution was approximately normal. The Levene's Test was performed as part of the t-test procedure, and MANOVA was used to ensure no significant difference in variance between the male and female groups. The results of Levene's Test show that all SEL dimensions have a p-value of 0.05, meaning there is no violation of the assumption of homogeneity of variance. Thus, the t-test results can be interpreted without bias from heteroscedasticity.

Table 2.

Summary of Normality and Homogeneity Tests

No.	SEL Dimensions	Skewness	Kurtosis	Shapiro-Wilk P-Value	Levene's Test P-Value
1.	Emotion regulation	0,41	0.28	0.12	0.251
2.	Empathy	-0.33	0.15	0.09	0.346
3.	Cooperation	-0.27	-0.12	0.15	0.299
4.	Leadership	0.18	0.09	0.21	0.502
5.	Resilience to stress	-0.39	0.21	0.10	0.285

After confirming that the data met the parametric assumptions, an independent t-test was conducted to compare the average scores of each SEL dimension between men and women.

The results show significant differences in several dimensions of SEL capabilities:

1. Emotion Regulation: Adolescent girls have a higher average score ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.67$) than boys ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.72$), $t(519) = 4.67$, $p < 0.001$.
2. Empathy: Women also excelled in empathy ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 0.64$) vs men ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 0.69$), $t(519) = 4.23$, $p < 0.001$.
3. Cooperation: In cooperation, women scored $M = 4.05$ ($SD = 0.61$), while men $M = 3.87$ ($SD = 0.68$), $t(519) = 3.09$, $p = 0.002$.
4. Leadership: Men were higher in leadership ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.71$) vs women ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 0.65$), $t(519) = -4.12$, $p < 0.001$.
5. Resilience to stress: Men showed higher stress resistance ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.68$) than women ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.63$), $t(519) = -3.56$, $p < 0.001$.

Overall, these results show that women tend to be better at emotion regulation, empathy, and cooperation, while men are superior in leadership and stress resilience.

Table 3.

Comparison of Average SEL Scores by Gender

No.	SEL Dimensions	Man (N:230)		Women (N:291)		T-Value	P-Value
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1.	Emotion regulation	3.85	0.72	4.12	0.67	4.67	<0.001
2.	Empathy	3.81	0.69	4.08	0.64	4.23	<0.001
3.	Cooperation	3.87	0.68	4.05	0.61	3.09	0.002
4.	Leadership	3.92	0.71	3.68	0.65	-4.12	<0.001
5.	Resilience to stress	3.95	0.68	3.74	0.63	-3.56	<0.001



The MANOVA analysis was conducted to examine multivariate differences in overall SEL ability between males and females. The five dimensions of SEL are used as dependent variables, while gender is used as an independent variable.

MANOVA's results show a significant effect of gender on the overall SEL ability profile:

Pillai's Trace: 0.12

F-value: $F(5, 515) = 14.23$

Significance : $p < 0.001$

Partial Eta Squared (η^2) : 0.12

These findings suggest that gender significantly and moderately influences the five-dimensional combination of CELLS. Although each dimension contributes differently, gender differences overall affect the pattern of social-emotional skill development among adolescents in Yogyakarta.

The results of the t-test and MANOVA provide evidence that although no all differences. Actions show significant differences: there is a consistent pattern in which women excel in emotion regulation, empathy, and cooperation. At the same time, men are more dominant in leadership and resilience to stress.

These differences can be attributed to biological, psychological, and cultural factors. In the Yogyakarta area, Javanese values emphasizing manners and social hierarchy have also shaped the development of SEL abilities across both genders. Different social expectations for men and women reinforce polarization and hinder the development of emotional and social competence.

Although women have an advantage in managing emotions, they are also more prone to experiencing stress during adolescence. This is an essential note for educators and parents to provide the proper psychological support so that high SEL abilities are not disturbed by mental stress.

Discussion

The study on adolescent SEL found significant gender differences, with teenage girls generally excelling in emotion regulation, empathy, and cooperation. This research aligns with previous findings that women tend to be better than men in emotional and social areas, including interpersonal skills and sensitivity to others' emotions of others (Venkatappa et al., 2012; Fida et al., 2018). In the cultural context of Yogyakarta, social norms can influence the development of these abilities, where women are more encouraged to empathize and maintain harmony in relationships (Durlak et al., 2011)

In contrast, adolescent boys show excellence in leadership and resilience to stress. They tend to be more confident in group situations and have better ability to cope with mental stress (Zhang et al., 2024) Factors such as higher physical activity and social norms that encourage men to be independent may contribute to the development of these competencies (Cipriano & Strambler, 2024) These findings illustrate that differences in behavior between men and women are not only due to biological factors but are also influenced by the cultural and social context that governs expectations for each gender. (Barros & Sacau, 2021)

Interestingly, although women have advantages in managing emotions, they are also more susceptible to stress than men. This suggests that high emotional intelligence is not always directly proportional to psychological resilience (Cejudo et al., 2018; Sethi, 2023). In the context of cultural values in Yogyakarta, social pressures and cultural expectations of women may be factors contributing to high levels of stress experienced,



in line with studies showing that social expectations often affect mental health. (Yang et al., 2021)

This pattern of gender differences in SEL abilities has important implications for education, where SEL programs must be designed to be responsive to gender differences and local cultural contexts. Such programmes should not only strengthen social and emotional competence but also take into account the specific needs of each gender, for example, by providing additional support to help women manage stress and asking for help from men to improve empathy and cooperation (Durlak et al., 2011; Ledezma et al., 2020). Therefore, interventions that are more focused on the uniqueness of adolescent emotional and social skills development will be more effective in supporting the holistic development of adolescents in Yogyakarta (Coelho et al., 2023)(Abbruzzese et al., 2019). By understanding these differences, stakeholders can design more appropriate interventions to support adolescents' emotional and social development. (Wang et al., 2019; Cabello et al., 2016)

These findings have important implications for educators, parents, and policymakers in designing SEL programs that are responsive to gender and local cultural contexts. Such programs not only improve emotional and social competence in general, but also consider the specific needs of each gender group. For example, additional support may be needed to help women manage stress effectively, while men may need more help improving empathy and cooperation skills.

Overall, this study provided in-depth insights into how SEL's development differs between adolescent boys and girls in Yogyakarta. The results show that these differences are individual and strongly influenced by social, cultural, and family dynamics. By better understanding these differences, stakeholders can design more appropriate interventions to support adolescent holistic development, both emotionally and socially.

CONCLUSION

This study examines gender differences in Social Emotional Learning (SEL) abilities among adolescents in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, focusing on emotion regulation, empathy, cooperation, leadership, and stress resilience. The results showed that adolescent girls tended to excel in emotion regulation, empathy, and collaboration, while teenage boys were more dominant in leadership and stress resilience. These findings are consistent with previous research that highlighted women's propensity in emotional and social aspects, as well as men's superiority in leadership skills and mental resilience. These differences are influenced by biological factors and the cultural and social context in Yogyakarta, where Javanese norms, such as manners and social hierarchy, shape different expectations for adolescent boys and girls. Although women have higher emotional abilities, they are more susceptible to stress, suggesting that emotional intelligence is not always directly proportional to psychological resilience. In contrast, although they lack certain emotional aspects, men show greater resilience under pressure.

This research offers important implications for educators, parents, and policymakers in designing SEL programs that are responsive to gender and local cultural contexts. Such programs should be designed to meet the specific needs of each gender, for example, by providing additional support for women in managing stress and by helping men improve empathy and cooperation. By understanding the social, cultural, and environmental dynamics shaping the development of SEL, more appropriate



interventions can be designed to support the holistic development of adolescents in Yogyakarta.

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