

The effect of emotional intelligence on peer support for students with disabilities in inclusive junior high schools in semarang

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Abstract: *This study aimed to examine the effect of emotional intelligence among students without disabilities on their peer support for students with disabilities in inclusive junior high schools in Semarang City. Employing a quantitative approach with a multistage sampling method, the study involved 234 respondents selected through purposive sampling based on participant criteria and simple random sampling for school selection. Data were collected directly using an emotional intelligence scale and a peer support scale, and were subsequently analyzed using simple linear regression. The results indicated that emotional intelligence had a positive and significant effect on peer support ($t = 10,912$; $p < 0,001$), with an R^2 value of 0,339. This finding demonstrates that emotional intelligence accounted for 33,9% of the variance in peer support behavior. The findings suggest that emotional intelligence is an important determinant in fostering supportive social interactions within inclusive school environments.*

Keywords: *emotional intelligence; peer support; inclusive schools.*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan menguji pengaruh kecerdasan emosional siswa non-disabilitas terhadap dukungan teman sebaya bagi siswa disabilitas di SMP inklusi Kota Semarang. Menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan metode *multi-stage sampling*, penelitian melibatkan 234 responden yang dipilih melalui teknik *purposive sampling* untuk kriteria subjek dan *simple random sampling* untuk lokasi penelitian. Data dikumpulkan secara langsung menggunakan skala kecerdasan emosional dan skala dukungan teman sebaya, kemudian dianalisis dengan regresi linear sederhana. Hasil menunjukkan kecerdasan emosional berpengaruh positif dan signifikan terhadap dukungan teman sebaya ($t=10,912$; $p<0,001$) dengan nilai R^2 sebesar 0,339. Hal ini menunjukkan kontribusi variabel kecerdasan emosional sebesar 33,9% terhadap dukungan teman sebaya. Temuan menyimpulkan bahwa kecerdasan emosional merupakan determinan kunci dalam menciptakan interaksi sosial yang suportif di sekolah inklusi.

Kata kunci: kecerdasan emosional; dukungan teman sebaya; sekolah inklusi.

INTRODUCTION

Education in Indonesia is a human right guaranteed by the state without discrimination, as stated in the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, which mandates efforts to educate the nation. To implement this right, the government has established a legal foundation through Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System. This regulation emphasizes that education must be equally accessible to all members of society, regardless of their background or physical condition. Therefore, it serves as the foundation for providing equitable, high-quality education for all citizens, including students with disabilities, who have the right to equal educational services.

An important component of the National Education System Law is special education, as regulated in Article 32. This article explains that special education refers to educational services for students who experience barriers to learning due to physical, emotional, mental, or social factors. In practice, special education in Indonesia is provided through two primary forms of service: special schools (Sekolah Luar Biasa or SLB) and inclusive education. Special schools are educational institutions specifically designed to serve students with particular needs, whereas inclusive education provides opportunities for students with disabilities to learn alongside students without disabilities in regular schools. According to Ramadani et al. (2024), inclusive education is an educational approach intended to accommodate and involve all learners, including students with disabilities, within the same school environment.

The implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia has been reinforced through the inclusive student admission policy, which requires schools to admit students with disabilities, as stipulated in Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 44 of 2019 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2019). In Semarang City, this commitment is reflected in the significant increase in the number of applicants through the inclusive admission pathway in 2024, which reached 130 students (Joglojateng, 2024). More recent data indicate even more substantial progress: in the 2025/2026 academic year, 74 inclusive junior high schools served 489 students with disabilities (Head of the Junior High School

Development Division, Semarang City Education Office, personal communication, October 22, 2025).

Although expanded access to inclusive education represents important progress in education, placing students with disabilities in regular classrooms does not automatically guarantee meaningful social participation. Evidence from school contexts indicates that students with disabilities tend to experience limitations in social interaction and friendships compared with their peers without disabilities (Schwab et al., 2021). This condition suggests that the success of inclusive education is determined not only by physical access but also by the quality of social acceptance established within the school environment. Support from teachers and peers is therefore a determining factor in facilitating students with disabilities' acceptance and social interaction in schools (Zulfitriah & Asti, 2023).

The failure to establish a supportive social environment is reflected in the prevalence of bullying incidents involving students with disabilities. Throughout 2024, several incidents of violence occurred in different regions, including the bullying of a junior high school student in Yogyakarta in February, physical violence against a student with a disability in Makassar in May, and a stone-throwing incident involving a student with a disability in Depok in October (CNN Indonesia, 2024; Detik.com, 2024; Kompas, 2024). These incidents provide clear evidence that student social interactions have not functioned optimally and that challenges in creating inclusive social environments remain a significant concern in the implementation of inclusive education. Therefore, peer support is a crucial aspect of the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Peer support refers to support provided by peers across various dimensions, including emotional, academic, and social support (Solomon, 2004). According to Solomon (2004), peer support comprises three interrelated dimensions: emotional, instrumental, and informational support. Emotional support involves providing a sense of security, empathy, and care that enables students with disabilities to feel socially accepted. Instrumental support is manifested in concrete, practical assistance, such as helping with physical mobility or assisting with daily classroom tasks. Informational support involves

providing guidance and advice to help students address learning barriers. These three dimensions are highly important in creating an inclusive educational environment. Recent research has shown that peer support plays an important role in enhancing the well-being and social engagement of students with disabilities in inclusive school settings (Salsabila & Fitria, 2025). In line with this finding, Pranata (2019) emphasized that the availability of peer support is an essential element in establishing positive social interactions in inclusive schools.

Peer support is fundamentally influenced by two main determinants: external and internal factors (Solomon, 2004). External factors include influences originating outside the individual, whereas internal factors include characteristics related to emotional intelligence, such as the ability to recognize and understand emotions and to manage them appropriately, including acknowledging those emotions. Consistent with Mayer and Salovey (1997), emotional intelligence encompasses the abilities to appraise one's own emotions, appraise others' emotions, regulate emotions, and use emotions effectively. These abilities help students develop empathy and provide appropriate support to their peers, including students with disabilities in inclusive schools. Recent research has also demonstrated that emotional intelligence is positively associated with empathy, which, in turn, encourages prosocial behavior among adolescents (Xu et al., 2023).

Junior high school students were selected as the participants in this study because this educational level represents a developmental stage that is vulnerable to discrimination, as reflected in the numerous bullying incidents involving students with disabilities. According to Erikson, as cited in Santrock (2021), junior high school students are in early adolescence, a stage characterized by a strong need for peer acceptance and the developmental crisis of identity versus role confusion. During this stage, peer relationships play an important role in identity formation and social adjustment. Therefore, peer support is particularly important for students with disabilities in enabling them to experience positive social interactions within inclusive school environments.

Previous studies have examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and social support. Macula (2017) demonstrated a

positive relationship between emotional intelligence and perceived social support. In Indonesia, a related study conducted by Pranata (2019) found that emotional intelligence influenced peer support among students in an inclusive senior high school in Jakarta. However, that study was limited to the senior high school level and was conducted in only one inclusive school in Jakarta. Consequently, its findings do not fully represent the experiences of junior high school students or the context of inclusive education in other regions. To date, studies investigating the effect of emotional intelligence on peer support among junior high school students in inclusive schools remain limited, particularly in Semarang City.

Semarang City was selected as the research setting due to its rapidly developing inclusive education system, as evidenced by 74 inclusive junior high schools serving 489 students with disabilities in the 2025/2026 academic year. This number reflects the high intensity of interactions between students without disabilities and students with disabilities in regular school environments, making Semarang a relevant context for examining the development of peer support. This investigation is important for understanding the role of emotional intelligence in fostering inclusive school environments. Based on this rationale, the hypothesis proposed in this study was that students' emotional intelligence has a positive and significant effect on their peer support for students with disabilities in inclusive junior high schools in Semarang City.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative, regression-based design to examine the effect of emotional intelligence on peer support among students without disabilities in inclusive junior high school settings. Based on the theoretical framework developed in this study, the proposed hypothesis was that students' emotional intelligence has a positive and significant effect on peer support for students with disabilities in inclusive junior high schools in Semarang City.

The study was conducted in January 2026 at four inclusive junior high schools in Semarang City: SMP Negeri 4, SMP Negeri 13, SMP Negeri 19, and SMP Negeri 30. The population consisted of all students without disabilities who were actively enrolled in the 74

inclusive junior high schools in Semarang City. The sampling technique employed a multistage sampling method. The first stage involved purposive sampling to establish the inclusion criteria: students without disabilities who were in the same classroom as students with disabilities and regularly interacted with them. Subsequently, simple random sampling was used to select the schools to be included as research sites. The sample size was determined using the LEMESHOW formula with a 95% confidence level ($Z = 1,96$), a maximum estimate ($p = 0,5$), and a sampling error of 10% ($d = 0,10$), yielding a minimum required sample of 97 respondents. This study involved 234 participants to obtain more representative data.

The emotional intelligence variable referred to individuals' abilities to appraise their own emotions, appraise others' emotions, use emotions, and regulate emotions. This variable was measured using the Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), which was adapted into an Indonesian version by Arribath (2025).

The instrument consists of 16 items and demonstrated construct validity through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), with factor loadings ranging from 0,489 to 0,860, and high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0,875$).

Meanwhile, the peer support variable measured emotional, instrumental, and informational support using an 18-item scale adopted from Pranata (2019). To avoid contamination effects, the peer support instrument was first pilot-tested with 30 students from another inclusive junior high school in Semarang City. The Pearson Product-Moment validity test indicated that all items were valid ($p < 0,05$), with a Cronbach's α coefficient of 0,839.

Data were collected directly using a four-point Likert-scale questionnaire. The data collection process adhered to research ethics by providing an explanation of the study objectives and obtaining signed informed consent from the respondents. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, classical assumption tests, and simple linear regression (Sugiyono, 2019), with the assistance of IBM SPSS.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	111	47,4
	Female	123	52,6
School of Origin	SMPN 4 Kota Semarang	59	25,2
	SMPN 13 Kota Semarang	61	26,1
	SMPN 19 Kota Semarang	61	26,1
	SMPN 30 Kota Semarang	53	22,6
Total Participants		234	100

Source: Processed primary data (2026).

Based on the data presented in Table 1, the participants were distributed relatively evenly across the four junior high schools in Semarang City. SMPN 13 and SMPN 19 accounted for the largest proportions of respondents, each at 26.1%, followed by SMPN 4 at 25.2% and SMPN 30 at 22.6%. This relatively balanced distribution is important to ensure that the findings are not predominantly influenced by the

characteristics of a single school, but instead reflect the conditions of students in inclusive schools in Semarang City more broadly.

In terms of gender, female respondents (52.6%) slightly outnumbered male respondents (47.4%). However, this difference was relatively small, indicating that the sample's gender composition remained fairly balanced. This condition suggests that the study data provide sufficiently proportional

representation, allowing the results to be generalized to the adolescent student

population without substantial gender bias.

Table 2. Descriptive Results of Score Categorization

Variable	Mean	SD	Category	Score Range	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
<i>Emotional Intelligence</i>	50,84	5,26	High	> 56,1	108	46,2
			Moderate	45,6 – 56,1	85	36,3
			Low	< 45,6	41	17,5
<i>Peer Support</i>	50,35	7,11	High	> 57,5	123	52,6
			Moderate	43,2 – 57,5	73	31,2
			Low	< 43,2	38	16,2
Total Participants					234	100

Source: Processed primary data (2026)

Based on the data in Table 2, most respondents were in the high emotional intelligence category (46,2%), with a mean score of 50,84 and a standard deviation of 5,26. This finding indicates that the respondents demonstrated relatively strong emotional management abilities. Similarly, the peer support variable was predominantly in the high category (52,6%), with a mean score of 50,35 and a standard deviation of 7,11. This finding suggests that students without disabilities tended to provide support to their peers with disabilities within inclusive school environments.

Prior to hypothesis testing, classical assumption tests were conducted to ensure that the regression model met the requirements for

parametric analysis (Sugiyono, 2019). The normality test yielded a p-value of 0,200 ($p > 0,05$), indicating that the residuals were normally distributed. The linearity test also produced a significance value for deviation from linearity of 0,134 ($p > 0,05$), suggesting a linear relationship between emotional intelligence and peer support. In addition, the heteroscedasticity test using the Glejser test yielded a significance value of 0,519 ($p > 0,05$), indicating the absence of heteroscedasticity in the research model. Because all assumptions were met, the analysis proceeded to simple linear regression to test the proposed hypothesis and examine the direction and strength of the relationship between the variables.

Table 3. Results of Simple Linear Regression Analysis

Variable	β	Standard Error	t	Sig.	R ²
(Constant)	11,257	3,615	3,114	0,002	0,339
<i>Emotional Intelligence</i>	0,786	0,072	10,902	<0,001	
Variabel Dependent: Peer Support					

Source: Processed primary data (2026)

Based on the data in Table 3, the regression equation obtained was $Y = 11,257 + 0,786X$. This equation indicates that emotional intelligence had a positive effect on peer support, such that each one-unit increase in emotional intelligence was associated with a 0,786-unit increase in peer support. The t-test yielded a p-value of $< 0,001$; therefore, the research hypothesis was supported. This result indicates a significant effect of emotional intelligence on peer support among students without disabilities in inclusive schools. In addition, the coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0,339 indicates that emotional intelligence accounted for 33,9% of the variance in peer support, with the remaining variance explained by factors outside the research model. This finding suggests that emotional intelligence plays an important role in shaping students without disabilities' tendency to provide support to their peers, particularly in inclusive education settings.

Theoretically, the results of this study strengthen Mayer and Salovey's (1997) model of emotional intelligence, which positions emotional intelligence as an individual capacity that facilitates social interaction through four integrated dimensions. This finding is consistent with Pranata's (2019) study, which emphasized that emotional intelligence has a significant effect on and is directly associated with students' willingness to provide support to their peers.

This effect can be explained through the contribution of each dimension of emotional intelligence. First, the dimension of self-emotion appraisal serves as the foundation of emotional awareness. Students who understand their own emotional conditions are likely to feel calmer and more confident, enabling them to minimize awkwardness or anxiety when interacting with students with disabilities. This explanation is supported by MacCann et al. (2020), who found that emotional self-awareness is closely associated with improved emotional regulation and social adaptation. Second, the dimension of others' emotion appraisal enables students to understand others' verbal and nonverbal expressions, thereby enhancing empathy and the quality of interpersonal relationships. Schwab et al. (2021) explained that the ability to understand others' emotions contributes to increased social

acceptance and more positive peer relationships within inclusive education settings.

Furthermore, the dimension of emotion utilization enables individuals to channel emotions productively into prosocial behaviors, such as helping peers who experience academic difficulties or mobility barriers. This finding is consistent with Meulen et al. (2021), who demonstrated that inclusive school environments can promote mutual helping behavior among students through peer social support. Meanwhile, the dimension of emotion regulation helps individuals manage negative emotional responses adaptively, thereby preventing exclusionary or aggressive behavior and directing students toward more positive social interactions. MacCann et al. (2020) emphasized that emotion regulation is an important factor in reducing maladaptive behavior and enhancing individuals' social functioning.

From a developmental perspective, the majority of participants in this study demonstrated high levels of emotional intelligence (46,2%) and peer support (52,6%). This phenomenon can be explained through Erikson's psychosocial theory, as cited in Santrock (2021), which positions adolescents in the stage of identity versus role confusion. During this developmental stage, adolescents actively construct their identities through their relationships with peers. In inclusive school contexts, the ability to act supportively toward students with disabilities may become part of adolescents' efforts to develop a positive, empathetic sense of self.

The analysis of the coefficient of determination (R^2) indicated that emotional intelligence accounted for 33,9% of the variance in peer support. This result suggests that 66,1% of the variance in peer support was influenced by factors outside the variable examined in this study. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological theory of development, social relationships and helping behaviors do not emerge instantaneously; instead, they are shaped by various interacting environmental systems surrounding the individual.

The remaining 66,1% of the variance can be understood through students' environmental systems. At the microsystem level, which refers to environments that directly interact with students, external factors such as

school climate, the role of school counselors, the availability of special education support teachers, and parenting practices that cultivate empathy at home may play major roles in encouraging students to behave supportively. At the mesosystem level, which concerns relationships between microsystems, collaboration and consistent communication between schools and the parents of students without disabilities may accelerate the development of an inclusive school culture.

Although environmental factors collectively account for a larger proportion of the variance, the internal influence of emotional intelligence among students without disabilities, which contributed 33,9%, remains a highly important finding. This result demonstrates that emotional intelligence is a strong internal resource that supports students without disabilities in displaying prosocial behavior and providing support to their peers with disabilities.

Nevertheless, this study has limitations regarding regional generalizability. Because the data collection focused only on inclusive junior high schools in Semarang City, the findings cannot necessarily be generalized to other regions. Differences in regional education policies, the availability of inclusive education facilities, and local cultural characteristics outside Semarang City may shape different patterns and dynamics of interaction in other inclusive school ecosystems.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis, it can be concluded that emotional intelligence had a positive and significant effect on peer support among students without disabilities in inclusive junior high schools in Semarang City. The majority of participants were in the high category for both emotional intelligence (46,2%) and peer support (52,6%). Although emotional intelligence accounted for 33,9% of the variance in the dependent variable, the remaining 66,1% was influenced by external factors outside the research model, such as school climate, the role of school counselors, the availability of special education support teachers, and parenting practices.

To follow up on these findings, schools and school counselors are recommended to implement practical interventions based on Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), such as

integrating empathy-building practices or brief discussions on emotion regulation into homeroom sessions. In addition, schools may implement a simple form of Peer-Mediated Intervention by arranging rotating seating plans or collaborative group activities that intentionally involve students without disabilities and their peers with disabilities, thereby allowing peer support to develop naturally.

Future researchers are encouraged to extend the research variables by incorporating environmental factors, involving a larger number of schools, and employing qualitative interview methods to explore the dynamics of actual social interactions in inclusive school settings in greater depth.

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