

The Effectiveness of the 'I Choose to Grow' Psychoeducation Program in Enhancing Adolescents' Social-Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract

Adolescence is a crucial developmental stage in which social-emotional intelligence supports psychological well-being and personal growth. However, difficulties in identifying healthy friendships and managing toxic peer relationships remain common among adolescents. To address this issue, a psychoeducational program entitled "I Choose to Grow" was conducted at Pelita 2 Junior High School, Jakarta, involving 90 students in a one-day intervention from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The program was based on Goleman's emotional intelligence theory and Erikson's psychosocial development theory, emphasizing emotional awareness and healthy social relationships during adolescence. Psychoeducation was chosen because it helps students improve self-awareness and social skills through reflective and experiential learning. Using a participatory approach, the activities included observation, interviews with school counsellors, interactive sessions, reflective worksheets, and follow-up interviews with students. Program evaluation through reflective responses and semi-structured interviews showed that students became more able to distinguish healthy and toxic friendships, understood emotional boundaries better, and felt more confident in social interactions. The findings indicate that the intervention contributed to improved emotional resilience and social competence among participants.

Keywords: *adolescents, emotional intelligence, peer relationships, social competence, psychoeducation*

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Introduction

Adolescence is a significant stage in human development characterized by major physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes. At this critical phase, socio-emotional intelligence the ability to understand, regulate, and express emotions while maintaining positive social relationships is highly important (Wijaya et al., 2020). Adolescents need strong social-emotional intelligence to manage life challenges, maintain mental health, and avoid negative behaviour (Wahyudi, 2012). This ability helps teenagers cope with peer pressure, resolve conflicts constructively, and develop empathy and interpersonal skills (Muhammad et al., 2025). Adolescents with high social-emotional intelligence tend to communicate effectively, understand their emotions, and engage positively with others, while low social-emotional intelligence may increase the risk of anxiety, depression, and social isolation (Goleman, 1995).

Social-emotional intelligence is closely related to emotional intelligence, which refers to the ability to recognize, understand, regulate, and express emotions arising from personal and social experiences (Goleman, 1995). Mayer and Salovey (1997) identified four dimensions of emotional intelligence: emotion perception, emotion facilitation of thinking, emotional understanding, and emotion regulation. Adolescents with higher emotional intelligence are generally better able to control impulses, respond adaptively to social conflict, and maintain healthier peer relationships. Therefore, emotional intelligence serves as an important foundation for adolescents' social development and long-term character formation (Zahroh, 2024).

The development of adolescents' social-emotional intelligence is influenced by several factors, including parenting style, peer relationships, school climate, and social media exposure (Halwati, 2024). Positive peer relationships are particularly important because they help adolescents develop empathy, emotional support, and healthy coping strategies during social interactions (Susiani et al., 2024). In the school setting, social-emotional learning can be strengthened through supportive classroom environments, teacher modelling, and character-based educational activities (Fatimah et al., 2023). However, adolescents today also face challenges from social media use, such as cyberbullying, social comparison, and pressure to maintain idealized self-images, which may negatively affect their emotional well-being (Taib et al., 2024).

Considering these challenges, psychoeducation is considered an effective approach in school settings because it provides students with structured knowledge, emotional awareness, and practical coping skills through interactive and reflective learning methods. Psychoeducational interventions in schools are effective because adolescents spend a significant amount of time in educational environments where peer interactions frequently occur. Previous studies have shown that psychoeducation using discussions, simulations, games, and self-reflection activities can improve adolescents' self-awareness, empathy, emotional regulation, adaptability, and social competence (Durlak et al., 2011; Amelia, 2024). Furthermore, school-based psychoeducation allows preventive interventions to be delivered collectively and accessibly, helping students recognize unhealthy social behaviours before they develop into more serious psychosocial problems.

Based on these considerations, the “I Choose to Grow” workshop was conducted at Pelita 2 Junior High School, Jakarta. This school was selected because preliminary observations and interviews with the school counsellor revealed that many students experienced difficulties in identifying healthy friendships, managing peer pressure, and recognizing toxic relationship patterns in their daily social interactions. Several students were reported to experience exclusion, unhealthy dependency in friendships, and emotional discomfort in peer relationships, yet lacked sufficient understanding of emotional boundaries and healthy coping strategies. These conditions indicated the need for a psychoeducational intervention focused on strengthening students' social-emotional skills, particularly in understanding healthy peer relationships, empathy, self-respect, and emotional boundaries. Through interactive and reflective activities, the program aimed to help students develop greater awareness of toxic friendships and encourage healthier social interactions.

Methods

This community service project employed the Participatory Action Research (PAR) method, involving collaboration between the facilitation team, school principal, teachers, and school counsellor in identifying students' social-emotional issues and evaluating the intervention program. The intervention was conducted at Pelita 2 Junior High School, Jakarta, Indonesia, and involved 90 junior high school students. The project began with preliminary observations and semi-structured interviews with the school counsellor to gain insight into students'

difficulties in establishing and maintaining healthy peer relationships. The findings indicated that many students experienced challenges related to peer pressure, toxic friendships, emotional boundaries, and unhealthy social interactions, highlighting the need for a psychoeducational intervention focused on healthy relationships and social-emotional skills.

Based on these findings, a psychoeducational workshop entitled “I Choose to Grow” was developed and implemented. Psychoeducation was used as the primary intervention approach because it combines educational activities with reflective and experiential learning processes to improve adolescents’ emotional awareness, understanding, and coping skills in social situations. The workshop was conducted in a 3-hour session and consisted of interactive presentations, self-reflection activities, and follow-up interviews. The presentation session discussed the characteristics of healthy friendships, signs of toxic relationships, emotional boundaries, and the negative impact of harmful social interactions. The reflective session required students to complete open-ended worksheets about their personal experiences with friendships and peer relationships. In addition, follow-up interviews were conducted with several participants to evaluate their understanding of the material, perceptions of the program, and perceived benefits after participating in the psychoeducational activities.



Fig. 1. Presentation of material by the facilitation team to students of Pelita 2 Junior High School Jakarta during the psychoeducation session “I Choose to Grow”

Figure 1 illustrates the material presentation session conducted by the facilitation team. During this session, students received psychoeducational information regarding healthy friendships,

emotional boundaries, characteristics of toxic relationships, and strategies for managing peer pressure. Interactive discussions were incorporated to encourage student participation and facilitate understanding of the concepts presented.

Results and Discussions

Result

The “I Choose to Grow” workshop at Pelita 2 Junior High School, Jakarta, aimed to improve students’ understanding of healthy friendships and increase awareness of toxic peer relationships. The psychoeducational intervention consisted of three main activities: interactive material delivery, personal reflection exercises, and follow-up interviews to evaluate students’ understanding after the session. The intervention materials were primarily developed based on Goleman’s theory of emotional intelligence and Erikson’s psychosocial development theory, particularly regarding adolescents’ identity formation, emotional regulation, empathy, and social relationship development. These theoretical foundations were integrated into discussions about emotional boundaries, supportive friendships, peer pressure, and unhealthy social interaction patterns.

The workshop was conducted in a 3-hour interactive session involving 90 students, facilitated by 2 main facilitators and assisted by 4 assistant facilitators. This facilitator-to-participant ratio allowed the team to maintain active student engagement, monitor group dynamics effectively, and provide support during reflective activities and discussions. The session began with a PowerPoint-based presentation discussing the importance of healthy friendships, characteristics of positive peer relationships, forms of toxic friendship behaviours such as manipulation, exclusion, and excessive social pressure, as well as strategies for managing unhealthy relationships. The psychoeducational approach encouraged active participation through discussions and interactive communication, enabling students to relate the material to their own social experiences and increasing the effectiveness of the intervention process.

Figure 2 shows students completing reflective worksheets designed to help them identify personal experiences related to healthy and unhealthy friendships. Through this activity, students were encouraged to connect the psychoeducational material with their own social experiences and develop greater awareness of emotional boundaries and supportive peer

relationships.



Fig. 2. Students completing personal reflection worksheets on experiences with toxic friendships and supportive peer relationships

To evaluate the effectiveness of the psychoeducational intervention, students were asked to complete reflective worksheets containing three open-ended questions related to their friendship experiences, coping responses, and perceptions of supportive peer relationships. The responses were analyzed qualitatively to identify themes associated with emotional awareness, peer relationship patterns, emotional boundaries, and social coping strategies. Several students' responses demonstrated increased understanding of healthy and unhealthy friendships after participating in the workshop. Examples of students' reflection responses are presented in Table 1.

In addition, follow-up interviews were conducted with selected students to compare their understanding before and after the intervention. The comparison focused on students' perceptions of friendship, emotional boundaries, and recognition of toxic relationship patterns. The findings indicated that students showed greater awareness of healthy peer relationships and improved understanding of supportive social interactions following the psychoeducational session. Examples of the comparison results are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Students' reflection responses during the psychoeducational session

Student	Question 1: Have you ever had a bad friendship?	Question 2: What did you do at that time?	Question 3: Give an example of a friend who helps you grow as a person
Student 1	"Yes, I had a friend who often mocked me in front of others and became angry when I talked to different friends."	"At first, I stayed quiet because I was afraid of being excluded, but later I slowly kept my distance from that friendship."	"My classmate always reminds me to stay calm and study together when I feel stressed before exams."
Student 2	"I once had a friendship where my friends forced me to follow what they wanted even when I felt uncomfortable."	"I followed them at first because I wanted to be accepted, but after some time I told them that I did not like being treated that way."	"One of my friends always listens to my problems without laughing at me and gives me advice."
Student 3	"Yes, I had a friend who liked comparing me with others and made me feel insecure."	"I tried to avoid arguments and spent more time with other friends who made me feel appreciated."	"My friend encourages me when I fail and tells me not to give up easily."
Student 4	"I had friends who only came to me when they needed help and ignored me afterward."	"I felt sad, but I decided not to depend too much on those friendships anymore."	"A good friend helps me become more confident and reminds me to think positively."
Student 5	"I experienced being excluded from a group chat because I disagreed with my friends."	"I talked to another friend I trusted and tried not to blame myself too much."	"My supportive friend motivates me to join activities and helps me feel included."

Table 2. Comparison of students' understanding before and after the intervention

Student	Before Intervention	After Intervention
Student 6	"I thought that as long as someone was my close friend, I had to follow everything they wanted so they would not leave me."	"Now I understand that healthy friendships should make me feel respected and comfortable, not pressured."
Student 7	"I usually stayed silent when my friends made jokes that hurt my feelings because I was scared of losing friends."	"After the session, I realized that emotional boundaries are important and I can express my feelings respectfully."
Student 8	"I did not really know the difference between supportive friends and toxic friends before this activity."	"Now I can recognize signs of toxic friendships, such as manipulation and exclusion, and choose healthier friendships."

The written reflections demonstrated that students were able to identify real-life experiences related to unhealthy peer relationships and supportive friendships. Several students described experiences involving peer pressure, exclusion, manipulation, and feelings of insecurity caused by negative social comparisons. Some students reported remaining silent or complying with their friends' demands because they were afraid of losing social acceptance. In contrast, many students were also able to recognize positive friendship qualities, such as emotional support,

encouragement during academic difficulties, active listening, and respect for personal boundaries. These findings indicate that the reflective activities helped students become more aware of both harmful and supportive social interaction patterns.



Fig. 3. A student sharing personal experiences about healthy and unhealthy friendships during the final reflection session

Figure 3 presents a student sharing personal reflections during the final discussion session. This activity allowed participants to express their experiences, exchange perspectives with peers, and demonstrate their understanding of the characteristics of healthy and toxic friendships. The reflection process also provided qualitative evidence of increased social-emotional awareness following the intervention.

The reflection activities showed that students became more capable of distinguishing healthy and toxic friendship patterns. Several students demonstrated a better understanding of emotional boundaries and recognized that supportive friendships should provide respect, comfort, and encouragement rather than pressure or manipulation. These findings indicate that psychoeducational interventions using reflective and participatory learning methods can effectively increase adolescents' social-emotional awareness and interpersonal understanding. This result is consistent with previous studies showing that psychoeducational and social-emotional learning programs help adolescents improve emotional regulation, empathy, peer relationship skills, and social competence (Durlak et al., 2011; Amelia, 2024). In addition, research by Maryati et al. (2025) found that social intelligence training contributes to healthier

peer interactions and reduces maladaptive social behaviours among adolescents. Therefore, the combination of psychoeducation, self-reflection, and interactive discussion in this intervention helped students connect theoretical concepts with their personal social experiences more meaningfully and effectively.

Discussions

The session created a space where students could learn and think about friendship in a way that helped them better understand how it works in their daily lives. Students gained a theoretical understanding of toxic friendships through the completion of reflection worksheets and participation in follow-up interviews, enabling them to relate this knowledge to their personal experiences. This indicates a process of internalizing values and fostering social-emotional learning.

These results align with Erikson's theory of adolescent development, which emphasizes the importance of identity formation and strong social connections during middle school years. When children identify relationships that promote their growth, they concurrently acquire the skills to set boundaries, boost self-esteem, and choose more beneficial social environments. The program showed that using an experiential learning method works very well for teens. These kinds of activities can improve school counseling programs and help stop problems with social relationships and mental health during the teenage years.

Conclusion

The community service project through the “I Choose to Grow” psychoeducational workshop successfully achieved its primary objective of increasing students’ understanding of healthy peer relationships and awareness of toxic friendships. After participating in the intervention, students demonstrated better recognition of emotional boundaries, healthier friendship characteristics, and harmful social interaction patterns. Students were also more able to identify supportive peer relationships that positively contributed to their emotional well-being and personal growth.

The conclusions of this program were developed based on qualitative data collected through observations, reflective worksheets, and students’ verbal responses during the reflection

session. The data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis by identifying recurring themes related to emotional awareness, peer pressure, toxic friendship patterns, coping strategies, and supportive social relationships. The findings consistently showed that students became more aware of unhealthy friendship dynamics and demonstrated improved understanding of positive social interactions after participating in the psychoeducational activities.

The Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, which had been integrated into the method design through collaboration with the school counsellor and school representatives, also contributed to the effectiveness of the intervention. Preliminary observations and discussions with the school counsellor allowed the intervention materials to be developed based on the actual social-emotional challenges experienced by students. The combination of psychoeducation, reflective activities, and participatory learning created a supportive environment that encouraged students to actively relate the material to their own social experiences.

Overall, this program contributed to improving students' social-emotional awareness and understanding of healthy peer relationships in the school setting. Future programs are recommended to involve parents and homeroom teachers more actively to strengthen students' social-emotional support systems. In addition, follow-up evaluations using psychosocial assessments or longitudinal monitoring may help measure the long-term effectiveness of psychoeducational interventions on adolescents' social and emotional development.

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