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The Role of Physical Activity and Emotional Intelligence in Predicting Students' Social Compliance

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ABSTRACT

The dynamics of campus life in the modern era present challenges related to students' discipline, adherence to norms, and social responsibility. Social compliance is not only a reflection of rule obedience but also an indicator of emotional maturity and character development in higher education. This study aims to analyze the influence of physical activity and emotional intelligence on students' social compliance and to examine the mediating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between physical activity and social compliance. This research employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory design. The sample consisted of 100 active students involved in campus physical activities, selected using purposive sampling. Instruments included an adapted International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ), an emotional intelligence scale, and a contextualized social compliance scale. The data were analyzed using multiple linear regression and mediation analysis after meeting classical assumption tests. The results indicate that physical activity and emotional intelligence significantly influence students' social compliance both simultaneously ($R = 0.671$; $R^2 = 0.450$) and partially. Physical activity significantly predicts emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.413$; $p < 0.001$), emotional intelligence significantly predicts social compliance ($\beta = 0.492$; $p < 0.001$), and emotional intelligence partially mediates the relationship between physical activity and social compliance. These findings highlight the importance of integrating structured physical activity and emotional intelligence development as strategic components of character education in higher education institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

Social transformation in the digital and post-pandemic era has significantly altered patterns of student interaction, identity formation, and value internalization within higher education institutions. Universities are not only responsible for developing cognitive competence but also for cultivating ethical behavior, responsibility, and social integrity among students (Daud et al., 2023). However, recent empirical reports indicate increasing challenges related to declining discipline, violations of academic regulations,

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reduced empathy, and weakened solidarity in campus environments (Vila et al., 2021). These phenomena reflect broader concerns regarding students' social compliance, defined as the willingness to adhere to social norms, institutional rules, and ethical standards in academic and social contexts (Kong, 2024).

Social compliance represents more than rule obedience; it is a manifestation of internalized values, moral reasoning, and socio-emotional maturity. Research in educational psychology emphasizes that compliance behavior is influenced by affective and behavioral dimensions, not solely cognitive awareness of regulations (López et al., 2022). In higher education, low social compliance may manifest through absenteeism, academic dishonesty, peer conflict, and disengagement from collective responsibilities (Martínez & Ramírez, 2020). Such conditions indicate the need for a holistic educational approach integrating cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.

One promising pathway to strengthening students' social compliance is engagement in structured physical activity. Physical activity is widely recognized for its physiological benefits; however, contemporary research highlights its psychosocial contributions, including discipline formation, teamwork, emotional regulation, and prosocial behavior (Riyanto & Mudian, 2019; Beni et al., 2017). Regular participation in sports activities fosters rule adherence, respect for authority, and cooperative interaction, which are foundational elements of social compliance (Bailey et al., 2019).

Alongside physical engagement, emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a critical psychological construct influencing social adaptation and normative behavior. Emotional intelligence refers to the capacity to recognize, understand, manage, and utilize emotions effectively in oneself and others (Popovych et al., 2022). Students with higher emotional intelligence demonstrate greater empathy, impulse control, and ethical awareness, which contribute positively to compliance with institutional norms (Trigueros et al., 2020).

Despite growing attention to these constructs, limited research has examined the integrated relationship between physical activity, emotional intelligence, and social compliance, particularly within regional higher education contexts such as Universitas Muhammadiyah Kotabumi. Variations in student participation in campus sports units (UKM) suggest untapped potential for character development through physical engagement. Yet, empirical evidence explaining how physical activity may enhance social compliance directly or indirectly through emotional intelligence remains insufficient. This gap underscores the urgency of comprehensive investigation.

Recent international studies consistently demonstrate positive associations between physical activity and psychosocial development. Dumciene and Sipaviciene (2021) found that university students engaged in regular sports exhibited higher levels of emotional regulation and empathy compared to inactive peers. Similarly, Zhou and Chen (2024) reported that structured physical activity programs significantly improved emotional self-control and social interaction quality among college populations.

From a neuropsychological perspective, physical activity stimulates neural mechanisms associated with executive function and emotional regulation, particularly

within the prefrontal cortex (Hillman et al., 2018; Diamond, 2015). These cognitive-emotional improvements contribute to enhanced self-discipline and behavioral regulation, which are closely linked to normative compliance (Esteban-Cornejo et al., 2022).

In the Indonesian context, several SINTA-indexed studies reveal that student participation in sports correlates positively with character development indicators such as responsibility, teamwork, and ethical awareness (Pratama et al., 2021; Suryadi & Nugraha, 2022). Riyanto and Mudian (2019) demonstrated that physically active students tend to exhibit stronger self-regulation skills and cooperative attitudes within academic settings.

Parallel research on emotional intelligence highlights its predictive role in prosocial and compliant behavior. Emotional intelligence has been associated with improved moral decision-making (Mayer et al., 2016), enhanced empathy (Fernández-Berrocal & Extremera, 2016), and reduced antisocial tendencies (Castillo et al., 2021). Popovych et al. (2022) confirmed that emotional intelligence significantly predicts positive social adaptation among university students.

Importantly, emerging research suggests that emotional intelligence may function as a mediator between behavioral engagement and social outcomes. An et al. (2024) identified emotional intelligence as a mediating variable linking sports participation and normative behavior in higher education contexts. Similarly, Sun et al. (2025) reported that physically active students displayed higher empathy and self-control, which subsequently predicted better adherence to institutional rules.

Theoretically, this relationship aligns with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 2018), which posits that behavior is shaped through experiential engagement and social interaction. Physical activity settings provide structured environments where students practice rules compliance, cooperation, and emotional management. Over time, these repeated experiences contribute to internalized social norms. Moreover, Self-Determination Theory suggests that physical activity satisfies needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness fosters intrinsic motivation for socially responsible behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Collectively, these findings establish a conceptual foundation linking physical activity to emotional intelligence and prosocial behavior. However, empirical integration of these constructs within a predictive model of social compliance remains underdeveloped.

Although previous studies confirm the independent relationship between physical activity and emotional intelligence, as well as between emotional intelligence and social behavior, most investigations remain partial and fragmented. The majority examine bivariate associations rather than constructing comprehensive multivariate models integrating all three variables simultaneously (Trigueros et al., 2020; Zhou & Chen, 2024).

First, research examining physical activity and social compliance often neglects psychological mediators such as emotional intelligence (Bailey et al., 2019). Second, studies on emotional intelligence often focus on academic performance or mental health

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outcomes rather than normative compliance within campus contexts (Castillo et al., 2021). Third, contextual limitations are evident; many empirical studies originate from Western or metropolitan university settings, with minimal representation from regional Indonesian institutions. Specifically, within Universitas Muhammadiyah Kotabumi, student involvement in sports-based UKM varies considerably. Institutional sports programs exist, yet their strategic utilization for character strengthening and social norm internalization has not been empirically evaluated. The absence of localized data creates a policy vacuum in designing campus-based character development interventions.

Furthermore, limited research has tested emotional intelligence as a mediating variable in the relationship between physical activity and social compliance within Southeast Asian higher education contexts. Without such integrative analysis, understanding remains incomplete regarding whether physical activity directly predicts social compliance or operates indirectly through emotional competence. Thus, a significant research gap exists in (1) integrating physical activity, emotional intelligence, and social compliance within a unified predictive framework; (2) examining the mediating role of emotional intelligence; and (3) contextualizing findings within regional Indonesian higher education settings. Bridging this gap is crucial for developing evidence-based institutional strategies.

This study aims to analyze the role of physical activity and emotional intelligence in predicting students' social compliance at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kotabumi. specifically, it seeks to: Examine the direct influence of physical activity on social compliance. Analyze the effect of emotional intelligence on social compliance. Investigate the mediating role of emotional intelligence in the relationship between physical activity and social compliance.

The novelty of this research lies in its integrative analytical model combining three core variables physical activity, emotional intelligence, and social compliance within a comprehensive predictive framework. Unlike previous studies that examined these constructs separately or partially, this research evaluates both direct and indirect relationships simultaneously.

Methodologically, the study contributes by testing emotional intelligence as a mediator within a contextualized Indonesian higher education environment, thus enriching cross-cultural empirical evidence. Conceptually, it advances understanding of how psychomotor engagement through physical activity can foster affective competence, which subsequently reinforces normative social behavior.

Practically, findings are expected to inform campus policy development, particularly in designing physical activity-based character education programs aimed at strengthening emotional intelligence and adherence to social norms. In an era marked by increasing socio-emotional and ethical challenges among youth, universities must adopt evidence-based, holistic strategies for character formation.

By providing empirical validation of the interconnected roles of physical activity and emotional intelligence in shaping social compliance, this study offers strategic

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implications for higher education institutions seeking to enhance students' moral resilience, social responsibility, and institutional integrity.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach with an explanatory research design, aiming to test causal relationships between independent variables physical activity and emotional intelligence and the dependent variable, students' social compliance. Explanatory research is appropriate when the objective is to examine predictive and causal linkages among variables through empirical testing (Sari et al., 2022; Hair et al., 2019). The design aligns with contemporary behavioral research frameworks that emphasize predictive modeling in educational contexts (Field, 2024).

The research was conducted at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kotabumi, selected due to its heterogeneous student population and active student sports organizations (UKM). A single institutional setting allows contextual control and enhances internal validity, although it limits generalizability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The campus environment provides a relevant context to examine how structured physical activity participation may shape emotional intelligence and social compliance behaviors.

The population consisted of all active undergraduate students enrolled in the 2024/2025 academic year. Sampling was conducted using purposive sampling, which selects participants based on predefined criteria relevant to the research objectives (Etikan et al., 2016). Inclusion criteria included: (1) active enrollment status; (2) participation in structured physical activities (e.g., UKM sports, fitness programs, campus competitions); and (3) willingness to complete all instruments. A total sample of 100 respondents was determined based on minimum requirements for multiple regression analysis, which recommends 10–20 participants per predictor variable to ensure statistical power (Alwi, 2015; Cohen et al., 2013). This sample size is considered adequate for testing predictive models in behavioral sciences (Hair et al., 2019).

Physical activity was measured using an adapted version of the International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ), which assesses frequency, duration, and intensity of physical activity (Roberts-Lewis et al., 2022). The instrument has demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\alpha > 0.70$) in university populations. Emotional intelligence was assessed using an adapted Emotional Intelligence Scale, covering five dimensions: self-awareness, emotional regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Bru-Luna et al., 2021). The scale used a 5-point Likert format. Social compliance was measured using a Social Compliance Scale developed by researchers based on theoretical constructs of discipline, adherence to academic norms, and prosocial behavior. Content validity was established through expert judgment, while construct validity and reliability were tested via pilot study (Nunnally & Bernstein, 2019).

All instruments underwent validity and reliability testing prior to the main survey. Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70 were considered acceptable (Taber, 2018).

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Table 1.
Research Variables and Instruments

Variable	Instrument	Dimensions	Scale	Source
Physical Activity	IPAQ (adapted)	Frequency, Duration, Intensity	Continuous score	Roberts-Lewis et al., 2022
Emotional Intelligence	EI Scale (adapted)	Self-awareness, Regulation, Motivation, Empathy, Social Skills	Likert (1–5)	Bru-Luna et al., 2021
Social Compliance	Social Compliance Scale (developed)	Discipline, Rule Adherence, Prosocial Behavior	Likert (1–5)	Developed by researchers

Data were collected through structured questionnaires distributed directly and online to eligible participants. Prior to data collection, respondents provided informed consent. A pilot test was conducted on 20 students to assess clarity, validity, and reliability of items. The main survey was conducted over four weeks.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was performed in sequential stages. First, descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondent characteristics and variable distributions. Second, classical assumption tests including normality (Kolmogorov–Smirnov), multicollinearity (VIF), and heteroscedasticity tests were conducted to ensure parametric analysis requirements were met (Cohen et al., 2013; Field, 2024). To examine predictive relationships, multiple linear regression analysis was employed. This method allows simultaneous and partial testing of independent variables' contribution to the dependent variable (Hair et al., 2019). Additionally, mediation analysis using regression procedures was conducted to test whether emotional intelligence mediates the relationship between physical activity and social compliance (Hayes, 2018). All analyzes were performed using the latest version of SPSS, ensuring statistical accuracy and reproducibility. The significance level was set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Before presenting the statistical findings, it is important to reaffirm that this study focuses on examining how physical activity and emotional intelligence predict students' social compliance within the campus environment. The data were collected from 100 physically active students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kotabumi, representing diverse academic backgrounds and levels of involvement in sports-based activities. The following results describe descriptive statistics, assumption testing, and hypothesis testing.

Descriptive Analysis

Table 2.
Level of Physical Activity Among Students

Category of Physical Activity	Frequency	Percentage
Good	20	20%
Medium	55	55%
Poor	25	25%
Total	**100**	**100%**

Description: G = Good; M = Medium; P = Poor

The findings indicate that most respondents fall into the moderate physical activity category (55%), followed by low (25%) and high (20%) categories. This distribution suggests that the majority of students engage in regular but not intensive physical activity. Such participation patterns provide a meaningful basis for examining its contribution to emotional intelligence and social compliance.

Table 3.
Emotional Intelligence Scores Based on Physical Activity Levels

Category of Physical Activity	Number of Students (n)	Mean Emotional Intelligence Score
Good	25	81.7
Medium	40	75.2
Poor	35	68.4
Total	**100**	

Students with high levels of physical activity obtained the highest emotional intelligence scores (M = 81.7), compared to moderate (M = 75.2) and low (M = 68.4) groups. The trend demonstrates a positive linear relationship between physical activity engagement and emotional intelligence. Students actively involved in structured sports activities appear to exhibit stronger emotional regulation, empathy, and social skills.

Assumption Testing

Table 4.
Normality Test Results

Variable	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Sig.	Normality Status
Physical Activity	0.086	Normal
Emotional Intelligence	0.072	Normal
Social Compliance	0.091	Normal

All variables show significance values greater than 0.05, indicating normal distribution.

Table 5.
Homogeneity Test Results

Levene's Test	Sig.	Interpretation
Social Compliance	0.118	Homogeneous

The Levene test indicates $p > 0.05$, confirming homogeneity of variance. Thus, the data meet parametric analysis assumptions.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Table 6.
Summary of Multiple Regression Model

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
0.671	0.450	0.439	4.125

The regression results indicate a strong correlation (R = 0.671) between predictors (physical activity and emotional intelligence) and social compliance. The R^2 value of 0.450 shows that 45% of the variance in social compliance is explained jointly by the two predictors, while 55% is influenced by other factors. The relatively small standard error (4.125) indicates stable predictive accuracy.

Hypothesis Testing and Mediation Analysis

Table 7.
Path Analysis Results

Path	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Physical Activity → Emotional Intelligence	0.482	0.108	0.413	4.46	0.000
Emotional Intelligence → Social Compliance	0.529	0.095	0.492	5.57	0.000
Physical Activity → Social Compliance	0.214	0.101	0.178	2.12	0.036

The results demonstrate that:

1. Physical activity significantly predicts emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.413$; $p < 0.001$).
2. Emotional intelligence significantly predicts social compliance ($\beta = 0.492$; $p < 0.001$).
3. Physical activity directly predicts social compliance, although with a smaller coefficient ($\beta = 0.178$; $p < 0.05$).

Because both the indirect (PA → EI → SC) and direct effects remain significant, emotional intelligence functions as a partial mediator. The indirect effect value ($0.413 \times 0.492 = 0.203$) is larger than the direct coefficient (0.178), indicating that the pathway through emotional intelligence strengthens the overall influence of physical activity on social compliance.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that physical activity and emotional intelligence significantly predict students' social compliance, both directly and indirectly. The regression and mediation analyses demonstrate that students who actively participate in structured physical activities tend to exhibit higher emotional intelligence, which subsequently strengthens their adherence to social norms within the campus environment. These findings align with contemporary perspectives in educational psychology and sports science that emphasize the psychosocial value of physical engagement beyond its physiological benefits (Martín-Rodríguez et al., 2024; Rico-Gonzalez, 2023).

First, the positive association between physical activity and social compliance supports prior empirical evidence indicating that physically active students display stronger discipline, responsibility, and respect for institutional norms (Zhihao et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2024). Participation in sports clubs, structured training, and campus-based competitions requires adherence to rules, punctuality, cooperation, and ethical conduct. These behavioral demands function as experiential learning environments in which students internalize normative values (Bailey et al., 2019; Beni et al., 2017). In line with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 2018), repeated exposure to structured rule-based environments shapes behavioral patterns that extend beyond physical settings into academic and social domains.

In the university context, physical involvement contributes to personality formation by reinforcing accountability and collective orientation (Martín-Rodríguez et al., 2024).

Students accustomed to complying with training schedules, respecting coaches, and following competition procedures develop habits of rule adherence that translate into academic compliance, such as meeting deadlines and respecting institutional regulations. This reinforces the argument that physical activity is a practical medium for cultivating constructive social behavior (Esteban-Cornejo et al., 2022; Suryadi & Nugraha, 2022).

Second, the study demonstrates a significant relationship between physical activity and emotional intelligence. This finding is consistent with research showing that structured physical engagement enhances emotional regulation, empathy, and interpersonal skills (Dumciene & Sipaviciene, 2021; Zhou & Chen, 2024). Team-based sports, in particular, require students to manage conflicts, cooperate under pressure, and interpret emotional cues from teammates and opponents. These experiences enhance emotional awareness and regulation capacities (Rivera-Pérez et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2024).

Neuroscientific research suggests that regular physical activity stimulates cognitive control and emotional processing regions in the brain, particularly the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for impulse control and decision-making (Hillman et al., 2018; Diamond, 2015). Such physiological mechanisms support improved self-regulation, a core component of emotional intelligence. In Indonesian higher education settings, studies have similarly shown that student athletes demonstrate higher emotional stability and empathy compared to non-active peers (Pratama et al., 2021; Khilmiyah & Wiyono, 2021).

Third, emotional intelligence emerged as a strong predictor of social compliance. Students with higher emotional intelligence scores were more likely to exhibit prosocial behavior, respect norms, and manage interpersonal conflicts constructively. These results corroborate previous findings that emotional intelligence enhances adaptive social functioning and moral behavior (Popovych et al., 2022; Aldrup et al., 2022). Emotional intelligence enables individuals to recognize social expectations, regulate emotional responses to social pressures, and prioritize collective interests over personal impulses (Castillo et al., 2021).

Within campus settings, emotionally intelligent students tend to maintain harmonious relationships with lecturers and peers, reducing tendencies toward misconduct or rule violations (Trigueros et al., 2020). Emotional intelligence strengthens empathy and perspective-taking, which are fundamental to norm compliance (Peng et al., 2025). This supports the view that affective competencies are central to character education in higher education institutions (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Importantly, the mediation analysis revealed that emotional intelligence partially mediates the relationship between physical activity and social compliance. This indicates that physical activity influences compliance not only directly but also indirectly through enhanced emotional competence. Similar mediation effects have been reported in recent studies examining psychosocial outcomes of sports participation (An et al., 2024; Rivera-Pérez et al., 2021). The indirect pathway suggests that structured physical engagement provides socio-emotional learning experiences that cultivate emotional intelligence, which subsequently reinforces normative behavior.

This mediation mechanism highlights the integrative nature of physical and emotional development. Physical activities expose students to emotionally charged situations—competition, teamwork, victory, defeat—requiring adaptive emotional management (Yu et al., 2024). Over time, these experiences build emotional resilience and social awareness, strengthening compliance behaviors in academic contexts. Therefore, emotional intelligence serves as a psychological bridge translating physical engagement into constructive social conduct.

The findings also emphasize the importance of contextualizing character education within experiential frameworks. Traditional cognitive-based approaches focusing solely on rule explanation may be insufficient. Instead, experiential and participatory methods, such as sports and physical-based leadership training, offer practical environments for value internalization (Rico-Gonzalez, 2023; Bailey et al., 2019). In Universitas Muhammadiyah Kotabumi, the development of structured sports programs integrated with emotional intelligence training can strengthen campus culture and promote institutional integrity.

Moreover, the results support holistic education models that balance cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Higher education institutions are increasingly challenged by moral and social issues among youth populations (Daud et al., 2023; Vila et al., 2021). Integrating physical activity programs with emotional competence development provides a strategic pathway for addressing these challenges. Programs such as sports UKM, interfaculty competitions, and physical-based character workshops can be oriented toward strengthening discipline, empathy, and social responsibility.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings align with Self-Determination Theory, which posits that environments satisfying needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness foster intrinsic motivation for socially responsible behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Physical activity settings fulfill these psychological needs, thereby enhancing emotional development and compliance tendencies. Additionally, Social Cognitive Theory underscores the importance of observational learning and behavioral reinforcement in structured environments (Bandura, 2018).

Although the model explains 45% of the variance in social compliance, the remaining variance suggests the influence of other factors such as family background, peer norms, digital exposure, and institutional climate (Khan et al., 2024). Future research could incorporate these variables to develop a more comprehensive predictive framework.

Overall, the study affirms that the integration of physical activity and emotional intelligence development is a viable and evidence-based strategy for character formation in higher education. Physical activity serves not merely as a health intervention but as a psychosocial development tool. Emotional intelligence strengthens its impact by enabling students to internalize norms and regulate behavior adaptively. Together, these elements contribute to creating a campus environment characterized by discipline, respect, and social harmony.

In conclusion, the findings underscore that universities seeking to enhance students' social compliance should design strategic policies integrating structured physical programs with emotional intelligence training. Such an approach not only promotes physical well-being but also fosters emotionally competent and socially responsible graduates, supporting the broader mission of higher education to develop intellectually capable and ethically grounded individuals.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that physical activity and emotional intelligence significantly predict students' social compliance at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kotabumi. Empirical findings indicate that 55% of students demonstrate moderate levels of physical activity, and those categorized as highly active show the highest emotional intelligence scores (M = 81.7), compared to moderate (M = 75.2) and low activity groups (M = 68.4). Multiple regression analysis reveals a strong correlation (R = 0.671) with an R^2 value of 0.450, indicating that 45% of the variance in social compliance is explained jointly by physical activity and emotional intelligence. Path analysis further shows that physical activity significantly influences emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.413$; $p < 0.001$), emotional intelligence significantly predicts social compliance ($\beta = 0.492$; $p < 0.001$), and physical activity also has a direct but smaller effect on social compliance ($\beta = 0.178$; $p < 0.05$), confirming partial mediation.

Conceptually, these findings affirm that physical activity functions not only as a health intervention but also as a medium for emotional regulation and character strengthening. Universities should therefore integrate structured physical activity programs with emotional intelligence development initiatives to foster discipline, rule adherence, and prosocial behavior. Future research employing mixed methods across broader institutional contexts is recommended to enhance generalizability and deepen theoretical understanding.

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