

**THE EFFECT OF GADGET USE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD  
SOCIAL EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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**Abstract:** *The development of digital technology has increased the intensity of gadget use in early childhood, which has the potential to have an impact on their social-emotional development. This study aims to examine the influence of gadget use on early childhood social-emotional development and the role of parental assistance in managing its use. The research method used is a descriptive qualitative approach through observation of children's behavior in play activities and literature study of various relevant research results. The results of the study show that uncontrolled use of gadgets tends to reduce the frequency of direct social interactions, reduce empathy skills, and affect children's emotional management. However, the limited and directed use of gadgets, especially through educational content that is appropriate to the child's developmental stage, can support the development of communication skills and emotional understanding. Therefore, an active role of parents and educators is needed in guiding the balanced use of gadgets so that children can benefit from technology without hindering their social-emotional development.*

**Keywords:** *gadgets, early childhood, social-emotional development, parental mentoring*

**Abstrak:** *Perkembangan teknologi digital telah meningkatkan intensitas penggunaan gadget pada anak usia dini, yang berpotensi berdampak pada perkembangan sosial-emosionalnya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pengaruh penggunaan gadget terhadap perkembangan sosial-emosional anak usia dini dan peran bantuan orang tua dalam mengelola penggunaannya. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif melalui pengamatan perilaku anak dalam kegiatan bermain dan kajian literatur terhadap berbagai hasil penelitian yang relevan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan gadget yang*

*tidak terkendali cenderung mengurangi frekuensi interaksi sosial langsung, mengurangi keterampilan empati, dan mempengaruhi manajemen emosi anak. Namun, penggunaan gadget yang terbatas dan terarah, terutama melalui konten edukasi yang sesuai dengan tahap perkembangan anak, dapat mendukung perkembangan keterampilan komunikasi dan pemahaman emosional. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan peran aktif orang tua dan pendidik dalam membimbing pemanfaatan gadget yang seimbang sehingga anak dapat memperoleh manfaat dari teknologi tanpa menghambat perkembangan sosial-emosionalnya.*

**Kata kunci:** *gadget, anak usia dini, perkembangan sosial-emosional, pendampingan orang tua*

## INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology in the modern era has brought significant changes in various aspects of life, including in early childhood parenting and education patterns. Gadgets such as smartphones, tablets, and laptops are now increasingly accessible and used by children, even from an early age. This condition makes the use of gadgets a common phenomenon in family life, especially in the home environment, so that it has the potential to affect the process of children's growth and development, especially in social and emotional aspects ([Clemente-Suárez et al., 2024](#)).

Early childhood is at a very crucial phase of development, where social and emotional abilities begin to be formed through direct interaction with the environment, parents, peers, and educators. At this stage, children learn to cooperate, share, control emotions, understand other people's feelings, and adjust to social rules. Optimal social-emotional development during this period is an important foundation for the formation of children's character and ability to interact healthily in the family and school environment ([Likhār et al., 2022](#)).

However, the reality in the field shows that the intensity of gadget use in early childhood tends to increase, especially in the home environment. Various studies reveal that excessive use of gadgets and without parental supervision has the potential to have a negative impact on children's social-emotional development. Children become less responsive to the environment, tend to ignore parental commands, prefer to play alone, and show decreased ability to interact and cooperate with peers. In addition, excessive exposure to gadgets also affects children's ability to manage emotions, such as irritability, difficulty controlling emotions, and showing impulsive behavior when the use of gadgets is restricted.

However, a number of studies also state that gadgets can provide benefits if used in a limited, directed manner, and accompanied by adult assistance. Educational content and learning applications that are appropriate to the stage of early childhood development have the potential to support children's language and cognitive development. However, in practice, the use of gadgets in early childhood is often more dominant as a means of entertainment than as a learning medium, so the risk of negative impacts on social-emotional development is greater.

Differences in children's behavior in the context of gadget use are also seen between home and school environments. Children tend to be more active, responsive, and able to follow the rules when they are in a school environment that has a structure and supervision of teachers. On the other hand, in the home

environment, children who often use gadgets show a tendency to lack focus, lack of obedience to their parents, and lack of social interaction with the surrounding environment. This condition shows that adult mentoring and supervision patterns play an important role in influencing the impact of gadget use in early childhood ([Zain et al., 2022](#)).

Based on this phenomenon, this study was directed to analyze the influence of gadget use on early childhood social-emotional development, with an emphasis on social behavior, emotional management, and the role of parents in controlling gadget use. This research is expected to provide an empirical picture of the impact of gadget use in children's daily lives and become a basis for parents and educators in formulating strategies for assisting the use of gadgets that are wiser and support children's social-emotional development optimally.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Gadget Use in Early Childhood

The rapid advancement of digital technology has led to increased exposure to gadgets among young children. Gadgets such as smartphones and tablets are frequently used not only as communication tools but also as sources of entertainment and informal learning. Several studies indicate that early childhood is a period when children are highly sensitive to environmental stimulation, including digital media. Excessive gadget use at an early age may influence children's daily behavior patterns, learning habits, and social interactions. Previous research highlights that children tend to use gadgets primarily for watching videos and playing games, often without adequate supervision. When gadget use becomes dominant in daily activities, children may spend less time engaging in physical play and direct interaction with peers and adults. This shift in activity patterns raises concerns regarding the impact of gadget use on children's holistic development, particularly in the social-emotional domain ([Clemente-Suárez et al., 2024; Zain et al., 2022](#))

### Social-Emotional Development of Early Childhood

Social-emotional development in early childhood refers to the process through which children learn to understand and manage emotions, build relationships, cooperate with others, and develop empathy. This development is shaped through direct interactions with parents, peers, teachers, and the surrounding environment. During this stage, children learn social norms, emotional regulation, and communication skills that are essential for later life. Studies emphasize that active social interaction, such as cooperative play and face-to-face communication, plays a crucial role in strengthening children's social competence and emotional stability. Conversely, limited social engagement may lead to difficulties in emotional regulation, reduced empathy, and challenges in social adjustment. Therefore, any factor that reduces opportunities for direct interaction, including excessive gadget use, may potentially disrupt social-emotional development ([Damayanti & Syafril, 2024](#)).

### Impact of Gadget Use on Social-Emotional Development

A growing body of literature reports that excessive and uncontrolled gadget use can negatively affect children's social-emotional development. Research findings

indicate that children who frequently engage with gadgets tend to show lower levels of social interaction, reduced attention to their surroundings, and decreased responsiveness to social cues. These children may also experience difficulties in expressing emotions appropriately and managing frustration. Several studies also report behavioral issues associated with prolonged gadget use, such as irritability, impulsive behavior, and emotional outbursts when gadget access is restricted. Children may become accustomed to instant gratification provided by digital applications, which can weaken their patience and self-regulation skills. Additionally, reliance on gadgets may reduce children's motivation to participate in group activities and cooperative play, which are essential for developing social competence. However, some studies suggest that gadgets can provide positive contributions when used appropriately. Educational applications and interactive digital content may support language development and cognitive skills, and in certain contexts, digital media can introduce basic social concepts. Nevertheless, these benefits are largely dependent on usage duration, content quality, and adult guidance ([Siregar & Nurhafizah, 2022](#); [Zain et al., 2022](#)).

### **The Role of Parents in Managing Gadget Use**

The literature consistently emphasizes the critical role of parents in mediating the effects of gadget use on young children. Parental supervision, time limitation, and content selection are key factors in minimizing negative impacts and enhancing potential benefits. Studies show that children whose parents actively guide gadget use tend to display better emotional control and social behavior compared to those who use gadgets without supervision. Parental strategies such as setting clear rules, encouraging alternative activities, and engaging children in outdoor play and social interaction are identified as effective approaches. Furthermore, parental involvement helps children understand appropriate digital behavior and balance screen time with real-world interactions. Without consistent parental guidance, gadget use may become excessive and negatively influence children's emotional and social well-being.

Research GAP of this study is that there is still limited research that integrates direct behavioral observations with literature analysis to explore social-emotional development in everyday contexts. Many studies focus on theoretical discussions or general behavioral outcomes without considering the differences between home and school environments. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by examining the influence of gadget use on children's social-emotional development through observational data and supporting literature, with special attention to the role of parents and patterns of daily interaction.

### **METHOD**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with observation methods and literature studies. This approach was chosen to gain a deep understanding of the influence of gadget use on early childhood social-emotional development in a real-life context.

The observation method was carried out to directly observe the social and emotional behavior of early childhood in the play environment. Observations were focused on the form of children's interaction with peers, the ability to express emotions,

responses to the social environment, and behavioral patterns that emerged during and after the use of gadgets. The observation data were recorded systematically to objectively describe the social-emotional condition of the child.

In addition to observation, this study also uses a literature study method. Literature studies are carried out by examining various relevant scientific sources, such as research journals, academic books, research reports, and scientific articles that discuss early childhood social-emotional development, the use of gadgets, and the impact of digital technology on children. This literature study aims to strengthen the theoretical foundation of research and provide a comprehensive perspective on previous research findings.

The data analysis technique is carried out through several stages. The first stage is data reduction, which is selecting and summarizing data from observations and literature reviews that are relevant to the focus of the research. The second stage is data presentation, where the reduced data is presented in the form of systematic narrative descriptions. The last stage is drawing conclusions, which is interpreting the data that has been presented to get an idea of the influence of gadget use on early childhood social-emotional development.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this day and age, almost everyone, from children to adults, has a gadget. In English, the term "*gadget*" refers to an electronic device that can perform a variety of functions. Gadgets continue to present new ways to make people's lives easier. Gadgets are also electronic devices that help people live their lives, especially when it comes to communicating. There are many types of gadgets, such as: tablets, laptops, and mobile phones, which are better known as "*smartphones*". Due to their small size, easy to carry, and larger usability than actual size, smartphones and tablets are currently one of the most commonly used gadgets, widely used by adults, as well as children. This is because it has advanced features and is easy to use ([Annisa et al., 2022](#)).

Meanwhile, the definition of early childhood is children who are in the age range of 0 to 6 years, an early period in life that is very important for physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and language development. During this period, children experience rapid development and require optimal stimulation from the surrounding environment, including from families, caregivers, and early childhood education institutions. Early childhood tends to have high curiosity and learn through exploration, play, and social interaction with others. This period is often referred to as the "*golden age*" because the foundational foundations for character development, skills, and understanding of the surrounding world are built at this stage. Therefore, a supportive and caring environment is essential to help children develop in a balanced and optimal manner in various aspects of their lives.

According to H. Bonner, social interaction is a relationship between two or more human individuals, in which the behavior of one individual influences, changes, or improves the behavior of another individual, or vice versa. According to Soerjono, in "*andarbeni*" social interaction is a dynamic social relationship that involves relationships between individuals, between human groups, and between individuals and human groups. According to Ahmadi, social interaction is a relationship between individuals and individuals or individuals and groups, where individuals change each other, influence each other, from other individuals the

individual can change, learn and vice versa. The statement shows that social interaction has so far been seen as an educational condition for individuals to acquire cognitive concepts, skills and strategies that affect social development and development in children and adolescents, positive social interaction relationships contribute to their acceptance by peers and result in satisfactory school adjustments. Based on the description above, it can be concluded that social interaction is a relationship between two or more individuals, where in these behaviors each other affect and change the behavior of other individuals or vice versa.

The use of gadgets among children, especially early childhood, can have a significant influence on their social development. Gadgets, which often contain engaging content, can distract children from direct social interaction with peers and adults around them. When children spend more time in front of screens, they miss out on opportunities to learn important social skills, such as sharing, alternating, and negotiating. This behavior can lead to difficulty in adapting in a social environment, especially when they interact with their peers. In addition, children who use gadgets more often tend to show signs of social isolation, where they prefer to play alone rather than participate in group games.

In face-to-face interactions, children learn to read other people's nonverbal cues and emotions, which are important for the development of empathy. However, dependence on gadgets can reduce this ability, making it difficult for children to understand the feelings of their friends. Research shows that children who are exposed to gadgets for too long can have difficulty expressing their emotions in appropriate ways, resulting in misunderstandings in social interactions. Children who use gadgets frequently may also exhibit impulsive behavior, as they are used to getting instant gratification from the apps and games they play. The skills to wait for their turn or to respect the opinions of others have also decreased.

In addition, the use of gadgets can change the way children communicate. Children who are used to communicating via text messages or apps may lack confidence in communicating in person, impacting their ability to speak in front of others. Gadgets can also affect the way children interact with their friends. Children who use gadgets more often may feel more comfortable interacting digitally than in person, which can hinder the development of social skills needed in daily life. In this context, the use of gadgets should be done with parental supervision, to ensure that children remain engaged in useful social interactions.

On the positive side, gadgets can also serve as a tool to expand children's social networks. Children can connect with old friends or make new friendships through online platforms, especially in situations where physical interaction is difficult. However, it's important to remember that relationships built virtually don't completely replace the value of face-to-face interactions. Children who constantly interact through gadgets may miss out on opportunities to learn interpersonal skills that can only be acquired through hands-on experience.

Parental involvement is essential in facilitating the healthy use of gadgets. By accompanying children when using gadgets, parents can help them understand good and bad content, as well as how to interact with others in a positive way. Parents can also create opportunities for social play outside of gadgets, so that children still get valuable experiences in interacting with their friends. Recommendations for reasonable gadget time, for example no more than one hour per day for early childhood, are also very important. With clear time constraints,

children can more easily turn their attention to more interactive and constructive social activities.

Education on the wise use of technology also needs to be implemented, so that children can understand the importance of a balance between screen time and social interaction. When children are given the opportunity to interact directly with their peers, they will be better able to develop the social skills needed in a variety of contexts. The expansion of these social skills will help them in living their daily lives, both in the school environment and at home. Gadgets are not always an obstacle in social development, as long as their use is managed wisely. Awareness of the influence of gadgets on children's social development is essential to create a generation that is not only technologically intelligent, but also has good social skills. In order to achieve this, collaboration between parents, educators, and the community is needed to support children's development holistically. With the right approach, the use of gadgets can be optimized as an aid, not a barrier, in children's social development

The influence of gadgets on children's social development. Developmental behavior to conform to the rules of society is called social development. Gadgets are a real example of technological advances that greatly influence people's behavior and thinking. The use of gadgets affects the behavior of adults and children, including their ability to interact socially. It is clear that gadgets have both positive and negative effects depending on how they are used. Playing with gadgets results in a lack of focus for children so that they cannot hear their parents' calls when playing. The impact is that children are used to ignoring and underestimating their parents' calls. Therefore, parents must take the gadget from their child's hands and invite him to talk so that something unwanted does not happen ([Octaviana & Asih, 2022](#); [Oktilenia Devindah & Zulkarnaen, 2024](#))

Early childhood is affected by the use of gadgets. In their daily lives, children are often seen using gadgets, especially when they are at home. Almost all children seem to be able to operate various features in gadgets such as games, videos, both educational videos and videos that come from Youtube and Tiktok content. Children feel happy and interested in the spectacle so that children, most of them, forget about time when playing gadgets at home. The following are the results of research findings in more depth related to the impact of gadget use on children's social-emotional development and efforts made by parents in reducing the use of gadgets in children. In this era, gadgets are increasingly rampant, from their unique shape and increasingly diverse applications so that it becomes a strong attraction for adults and even early childhood to have them, not only parents but also for early childhood to own and use gadgets and many impacts that will be caused, considering that early childhood is still in the growth and development phase that can be decisive in the future. The impact that can be caused by the use of gadgets is positive, but there are also negative. ([Hamdani et al., 2023](#))

Children who often play gadgets tend not to listen when focusing on playing gadgets can have a bad impact on children's health, development, criminal tendencies, behavior, and brain function. Children do not follow parental orders and do not respond to phone calls. They also prefer to play alone using gadgets rather than join friends their age. This causes them to become ignorant and indifferent to the surrounding environment. The results of the above interview show that children who play gadgets at home do not listen to their parents. This is a little different from

what happens at school and at home, where observational results show that children are more active and listen to teachers' instructions while at school. Although there are some children who do not listen well in class. The following are some of the negative impacts of using gadgets on children:

- a. Children are more fun to play gadgets so they forget about the people around them and often ignore their parents' orders and are more concerned with gadgets than activities that should be done.
- b. Children prefer to play gadgets rather than playing with their peers, and children have difficulty eating, are disturbed and do not respond when called.
- c. The use of gadgets can affect the mental and emotional state of children, emotionally children are easily angry and slam nearby items when the network is unstable and when they want to take gadgets that children use, it is very difficult to be persuaded to take a lot of effort. Children tend to be more prone to depression, stress and anxiety, because they are exposed to negative videos on social media. From the interviews that have been conducted, the average use of gadgets in early childhood is more than 2 hours a day, they spend more time playing online games.
- d. Giving gadgets to early childhood can make children use impolite language because imitating in videos that are not educational and also cause health problems in children, such as headaches, visual impairments and posture problems.
- e. Children who often play gadgets tend to be less skilled in communicating and interacting socially (low social skills), they may have difficulty in building strong interpersonal relationships with their friends, friends, and family.

[\(Afdalia & Gani, 2023\)](#)

Parental firmness is needed so that children are not spoiled and take advantage of opportunities to their parents. Gadgets affect children's social development and mental health. Children who are not restricted by their parents' use of gadgets can become indifferent and think that their parents are saying to them. Parents will take away the gadgets that the child is using if they realize that the child is becoming addicted and does not listen to them. Most children will cry or get angry. Psychoeducational programs for the use of gadgets in early childhood can increase parents' knowledge about the rules for using gadgets for early childhood. So that this program can prevent the bad influence caused by gadgets on early childhood. Parents' responsibilities to their children appear in various forms, parents' responsibilities include instilling a sense of love for fellow children, providing affection, treating children with gentleness, instilling moral education and others. Parents' strategies for overcoming the influence of gadget use on early childhood are an approach that is applied as a whole that involves the application of concepts, planning, and implementation of actions within a certain period of time. To achieve goals, an effective strategy requires good teamwork, problem-solving, identification of supporting factors based on rationality, and effective use of tactics and ideas. Usually, strategies are used to achieve goals and are implemented. This strategy can also be defined as the way parents and children act to achieve the goals that have been outlined. Parents can overcome the impact of gadget use on early childhood social development by accompanying, supervising, restricting, or allowing children to play outside the home to allow them to interact and socialize with the outside world.

Emotions are strong feelings directed at something or someone. When faced with certain circumstances, the body responds with emotions. As a result of how the situation is perceived, the nature and intensity of emotions are usually closely related to human cognition (thinking). Emotions have long been known as one of the most significant influences on human behavior. Humans can express feelings of happiness, anger, love, or fear through their actions. A child's emotional development is the process by which he learns to interact with the world around him and how to express and communicate his feelings. Early social behavior patterns include: cooperation, competition, sympathy, empathy, dependence, friendliness, selflessness, imitation, inherent behavior, generosity, and a desire for social acceptance are all examples of these characteristics.

In addition, as their emotional development progresses, children learn to identify and control various emotions, including happy, sad, angry, surprised, disappointed, afraid, and others. In this social-emotional aspect, children are greatly influenced by the family, school, peers, and community environment. Despite being in the same age range, each child will experience different social and emotional development from each other. This depends on who and where the child interacts ([Annisa et al., 2022](#)).

Based on the results of the research obtained, there are many children who have not shown good emotional development. Most of them have not been able to cooperate with their friends or be unable to cooperate with the group. This certainly has a bad impact on children's social-emotional development. Children who use gadgets too often mostly forget about the surrounding environment where they prefer to use gadgets to play so they rarely play with their friends. The child's ability to focus is also reduced. So that the child's social interaction with the environment, family and friends is reduced. This is what causes children to be unable to work with groups because of the lack of activities with their friends ([Octaviana & Asih, 2022](#)).

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of observations and literature studies carried out, it can be concluded that the use of gadgets in early childhood has a significant effect on children's social-emotional development. Excessive use of gadgets and without parental assistance tends to have negative impacts, such as reduced direct social interaction, low ability to cooperate with peers, decreased focus, and difficulty in managing emotions. Children also show a tendency to be less responsive to the surrounding environment and prefer individual activities to social games. The results of the study also show that there are differences in children's behavior between the home and school environments. Children tend to be more active, obedient, and able to interact socially well in schools that have rules and supervision, compared to at home when the use of gadgets is not controlled. This confirms that parenting and parenting patterns play an important role in determining the impact of gadget use in early childhood. Therefore, the use of gadgets in early childhood needs to be managed wisely through time restrictions, content supervision, and active assistance from parents and educators. With proper management, the negative impact of gadget use can be minimized so that children's social-emotional development continues to develop optimally

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## AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

All authors contributed equally to the publication of this paper, and all authors read and approved this paper, and all authors declare no conflict of interest.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All authors state that there is no conflict of interest.

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