

# Impact of Digital Media on Character Development and Social Skills Among Primary School Students at Sekolah Indonesia Jeddah

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## ABSTRACT

The increasing exposure of primary school students to digital media raises concerns about its influence on character development and social skills. This study examines the effects of digital media on students at Sekolah Indonesia Jeddah, focusing on responsibility, empathy, and discipline. Additionally, it explores the role of social-emotional learning (SEL) in mitigating negative effects and enhancing social behaviors. A mixed-method approach was employed, incorporating surveys, interviews, and behavioral observations. Data were collected from primary school students to assess their digital media consumption patterns and their impact on character development and social interactions. Findings reveal a significant relationship between digital media usage and students' character development. Increased screen time was associated with reduced face-to-face interactions, affecting empathy and collaboration. However, structured SEL interventions were found to enhance students' social skills, promoting responsibility and discipline despite high digital engagement. The study highlights the dual impact of digital media, where excessive usage can hinder interpersonal skills, while controlled exposure, combined with SEL strategies, fosters positive character traits. The integration of SEL into primary education emerges as a key approach to balancing digital consumption and social-emotional development. The findings emphasize the need for a balanced media exposure strategy and SEL integration in primary education to support students' holistic development. Educators and parents should collaborate to regulate media use and implement SEL programs that nurture essential social and emotional competencies.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has brought significant changes in various aspects of life, including education. In this digital era, elementary school students are increasingly exposed to digital media, either through electronic devices such as mobile phones, tablets, or computers (Bryson & O'Dwyer, 2023).

Students' use of digital media can affect various aspects of their development, including character and social skills. At Sekolah Indonesia Jeddah, the role of digital media becomes even more important as students not only use it for learning, but also for interacting and communicating. Character and social skills development are important aspects of basic education. Character includes values such as responsibility, discipline and empathy, while social skills include the ability to communicate, cooperate and empathise with others (Khilmiyah & Wiyono, 2021). The use of digital media can affect this process of character and social skills formation, both positively and negatively. Digital media has the potential to improve students' ability to search for information and communicate globally, but on the other hand, excessive use can disrupt face-to-face social interactions and reduce the depth of interpersonal relationships.

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has become a major focus in modern education, given the importance of students' holistic development, which includes both academic and non-academic aspects (Widiastuti, 2022). SEL encompasses a range of skills that enable students to manage emotions, build positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Orr & Lavy, 2024). The ability to interact and behave in order to be accepted in a social environment is an important aspect of social life. This ability can be trained by developing social skills early on, especially during primary school. According to Rivki et al., n.d., social skills are behaviours that support success in social interactions, enabling individuals to socialise effectively. Yue et al., (2024), also confirmed that social skills are behaviours that support individuals in interacting positively with society. Good social skills make it easier for students to be accepted in their social environment. Dr. Nufiar, (2022), stated that individuals with good social skills are more likely to be accepted by peers. Conversely, students with low social skills will have difficulty interacting with others. Based on these opinions, it can be concluded that social skills are basic skills that every child must have in order to be able to interact, adapt, socialise, and be accepted in the surrounding environment.

Research by Raisch, Bailey, & Jones (2024), showed that SEL programmes integrated into the primary school curriculum can significantly improve students' academic learning outcomes. In addition, students who engaged in social-emotional learning showed improvements in problem-solving ability, critical thinking skills, and class participation levels (Shen & Teng, 2024). Nonetheless, in Indonesia, the implementation of SEL in primary schools still faces various challenges, such as a lack of understanding and training for teachers, as well as limited resources (Barney, 2024). Therefore, this study aims to explore the influence of social emotional learning on academic achievement of primary school students in Umbulharjo sub-district, with the hope of providing insights and recommendations for the development of a more holistic education.

The PISA 2018 results (Hosozawa et al., 2021) indicate that 41% of students in Indonesia experience bullying several times a month, a rate higher than the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) average. Frequent bullying is linked to lower academic achievement, with affected students scoring 21 points lower in reading (Mandira & Stoltz, 2021). Additionally, these students often experience sadness, fear, reduced life satisfaction, and increased absenteeism. Research by Barney (2024) further highlights that students with low social-emotional competence tend to exhibit poor academic performance and disruptive behavior.

Schools play a crucial role in addressing bullying, character development, crime prevention, sex education, family education, and absenteeism (Widiastuti, 2022). However, character-building initiatives are often short-term, fragmented, and not aligned with the school's mission. When preventive programs are poorly coordinated, lack proper monitoring and evaluation, their impact on students remains limited and short-lived (Quereda et al., 2024). Therefore, a structured and integrated approach to social-emotional learning and character development is essential to ensure sustained positive outcomes for students.

According to Siswanta, (2017), failure to instil a good personality at an early age can lead to personality problems in adulthood. Suparno, (2018), states that there are many factors that influence character formation, which experts categorise into two groups: internal and external factors. Internal factors include: 1) instinct or habit, 2) custom or habit, 3) will or volition, 4) inner voice or conscience, and 5) heredity. While external factors include: 1) education, and 2) environment. One factor that greatly influences character formation is the presence of advanced technology in the current era of globalisation (Koszyán, Kiss, & Fehérvölgyi, 2024). According to Sunandari, Maharani, Nartika, Yulianti, & Esasaputra, (2023), in this era, technology can be used

easily by all groups, including children. Technology plays an important role in education, helping the learning process and the development of science, as well as a communication tool between educators and learners (Mayer & Schwemmler, 2023). However, technology has both positive and negative impacts on education. According to Suminar, (2019), learners need to make the best use of technology to support their learning. Cases such as cyberbullying, brawls between students, violence, and sexual harassment of children show the weakness of the nation's character. Therefore, good character must be formed and taught from an early age so that people can instill good traits and behaviour, so that the crime rate can be reduced.

## 2. METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the influence of digital media on the development of students' character and social skills at Sekolah Indonesia Jeddah. This method was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the impact of digital media on students' behavior, character, and social skills. The following are the steps taken in this study.

### 2.1 Research Subject

The subjects of this study were elementary school students at Sekolah Indonesia Jeddah, with samples selected purposively, namely students who actively use digital media both for learning purposes and in everyday life. The sample consisted of 30 students from grades 4 to 6. In addition, teachers and parents were also involved as supporting informants to provide perspectives on changes in student behavior.

### 2.2 Research Instruments

In this study, the instruments used included interviews, questionnaires, and observations. Questionnaires were distributed to students to measure the frequency of digital media use, the types of media used, and students' interactions with the media, including aspects of character development and social skills. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers and parents to gain in-depth insight into the influence of digital media on students, as well as interviews with several students to explore their experiences. Direct observations were conducted in the classroom and students' social environment to see the interaction and use of digital media in a social context.

Data were collected through three main stages: first, questionnaires were distributed to students to determine patterns of digital media use and students' perceptions of its impact; second, interviews were conducted with students, teachers, and parents to explore more deeply the impact of digital media on students' behavior, character, and social skills; and third, observations were conducted for one month to see students' interactions with digital media in the classroom and its influence on social dynamics in the school environment.

The data obtained were analyzed qualitatively through three stages: data reduction to simplify relevant information related to the impact of digital media, data presentation in the form of narrative descriptions based on the results of questionnaires, interviews, and observations, and drawing conclusions based on patterns that emerged from the data to understand the relationship between digital media use and the development of students' character and social skills. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, triangulation of data sources was carried out by comparing the results of questionnaires, interviews, and observations, as well as discussions with colleagues and education experts to verify the research findings.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Social Emotional Learning aims to implement an educational framework from preschool to elementary school that is based on evidence-based practices to improve students' social-emotional-cognitive development and academic performance (Widiastuti, 2022). The PSE program includes practices and policies that help children and adults acquire and apply knowledge, skills, and behaviors, build satisfying interpersonal relationships, and lead ethical, effective, and productive work. According to Kusumardi,

(2024), these practices and policies include competencies in understanding and managing emotions, setting and achieving positive goals, showing empathy for others, showing empathy for others, and showing empathy for others. showing empathy for others, managing positive relationships, and making responsible decisions.

### 3.1 Social And Emotional Education Framework

Self-awareness is the competency in understanding the emotions, personal goals, and values of others, including the ability to accurately assess strengths and weaknesses, have a positive mindset, and demonstrate self-efficacy and optimism. A high level of self-awareness requires the ability to recognize the relationship between thinking, feeling, and acting (Zeine, Jafari, Nami, & Blum, 2024). Self-management involves competency in regulating emotions and attitudes, such as goal-setting skills, delaying gratification, stress management, impulse control, and resilience in the face of challenges. Social awareness is the competency in understanding others' perspectives and appreciating different backgrounds and cultures, with an emphasis on empathy, compassion, and an understanding of social norms and resources from family, school, and community. Relationship skills include the ability to communicate clearly, listen actively, cooperate, resist inappropriate social pressure, resolve conflicts constructively, and help when needed. Responsible decision making is the ability to consider ethical standards, consider safety, and evaluate the consequences of actions, with the goal of maintaining the health and well-being of oneself and others. This competency involves taking responsibility for decision making based on knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and the ability to make constructive choices in a variety of social situations.

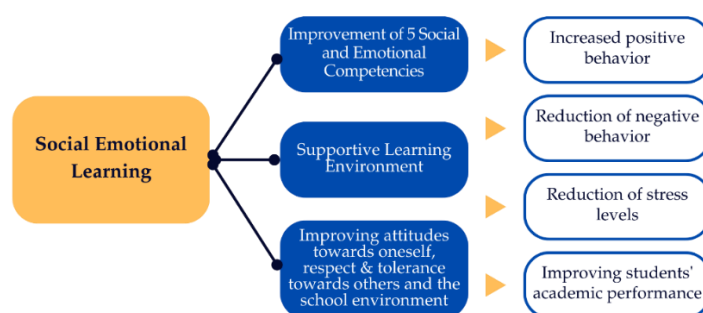


Figure 1. Social and Emotional Education Framework

From a social skills perspective, the use of digital media has varied impacts. On the one hand, digital media allows students to connect with their peers through various online platforms, such as social media and messaging applications. This expands their opportunities to communicate and collaborate outside the school environment (Garner, 2024). However, social interactions that occur virtually often reduce the quality of face-to-face interactions, which are essential for the development of empathy, social sensitivity, and the ability to communicate effectively. The inclusion of the word 'learning' in the term 'social emotional learning' by CASEL is deliberate and designed to reflect the mastery of skills and attitudes in the five competencies as a process. Schools are one of the main places where social-emotional learning occurs (Drew et al., 2024). Research on brain neuroplasticity and the capacity of individuals for lifelong learning has been conducted for more than three decades. Various PSE frameworks are available to systematically explain the parameters of PSE programs (Gerbaud, 2023). Nafiati, (2021), proposed the framework depicted in Figure 1, which emphasizes (1) the five cognitive, affective, and attitudinal domains as the basis for achieving success in school and in life; (2) the formation of attitudes and behavior, both short-term and long-term, as a result of the PSE program; (3) strategies involving classes, schools, families, and communities to improve social-cognitive-attitude development; and (4) government policies that support the implementation of PSE and improve student learning outcomes.



**Figure 2:** Conceptual Model of PSE in the Context of Education

Local Personal and Social Education (PSE) consists of four key components: (1) securing commitment and support for PSE, (2) assessing available resources and needs, (3) developing PSE programs within classrooms, schools, and communities, and (4) implementing systems for measurement and continuous improvement. These components serve as foundational inputs for school-based PSE programs.

School PSE programs are built around five core competencies, which can be integrated into the curriculum and classroom instruction. Their effectiveness is reinforced through school climate, policies, and practices, along with parental and community involvement. After incorporating insights from local PSE, school-based PSE initiatives lead to short-term and long-term student outcomes. However, local PSE can also directly contribute to student outcomes without necessarily being mediated through schools.

Short-term outcomes of PSE include improved social and emotional skills, positive attitudes toward self and others, stronger social relationships, reduced behavioral problems, lower distress levels, and enhanced academic performance (Sumarni, 2022). These short-term benefits serve as a foundation for long-term outcomes, such as higher high school graduation rates, career and college readiness, healthier relationships, reduced criminal activity, and increased community engagement.

At both the local and school levels, the effectiveness of PSE programs is shaped by state policies and institutional support. A well-structured and adequately supported PSE framework ensures sustainable positive impacts on students' personal, academic, and social development.



**Figure 3:** Application of Digital Media to Character Development and Social Skills

Based on these findings, schools need to adopt a holistic approach to digital media use (Almethen & Alomair, 2024). Schools can consider developing policies that promote balanced digital media use, where students are taught to use technology positively in their academic and social lives, without neglecting direct social interaction and character development. Training for teachers on the use of SEL approaches can also be further optimized so that they can support students in facing the challenges that arise from the use of digital technology. PSE includes universal programs aimed at all students, along with specific supports to

enable students to gain experience in social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties (Ulfert-Blank & Schmidt, 2022). PSE involves learning to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, and build positive relationships with others. The goal of PSE is the integration of behavior, cognition, and emotion. PSE programs are designed to support student development, help them develop healthy behaviors, and prevent engagement in unhealthy behaviors.

### 3.2 Interview, Questionnaire, and Observation Results



**Figure 4:** Teachers, together with peers, conduct collaboration

The use of digital media, especially in the form of smartphones and social media applications, tends to affect aspects of student character. Students who spend more time using digital media tend to experience decreased discipline in terms of learning time management and responsibility for schoolwork. Several students admitted that they were often distracted by digital media while working on assignments, resulting in decreased quality of work. This is in line with previous research stating that excessive use of technology can interfere with children's cognitive and emotional development (Fekson, Michaeli, Rosch, Schlaggar, & Horowitz-Kraus, 2023). Based on the results of semi-structured interviews, both teachers and parents agreed that digital media has a positive impact on students, especially in increasing interest in learning and understanding of subject matter. Most teachers (85%) agreed that digital media increases students' interest in learning, and 90% of them felt that this technology helped students understand the material. In addition, 70% of teachers considered digital media to improve classroom interactions, although some saw a negative impact on student concentration and activeness. Challenges in using digital media were recognized by 80% of teachers, especially related to technical problems and limited access, and 65% were aware of risks such as distraction and technology dependence.

On the parent side, 75% admitted that digital media affects children's interactions at home, both in terms of communication and social relationships. Half of them also saw changes in children's behavior due to the use of digital media, especially in terms of concentration and daily behavior. Parents also face challenges in supervising digital media use, with 80% stating difficulties in managing children's screen time. However, 70% of parents agree that digital media helps their children understand lesson materials, although 30% doubt its impact. Overall, digital media is considered to provide great benefits in learning, but there needs to be a balance in its use to minimize negative impacts and challenges that arise both at school and at home.

**Table 1.** Results of the questionnaire regarding the use of digital media

Question	Percentage of Answers
Duration of digital media use 1-2 hours per day	40%
Use of digital media for school purposes	60%
Parents set time limits for using digital media	70%
Digital media helps understand lessons	50%
The influence of digital media on interaction	40%
The influence of digital media makes students patient and independent	30%
The influence of digital media on social skills	45%
Digital media helps learn character values (honesty, cooperation, discipline)	40%
Feel more responsible in using digital media	60%
Digital media makes students distracted or less focused when studying	50%

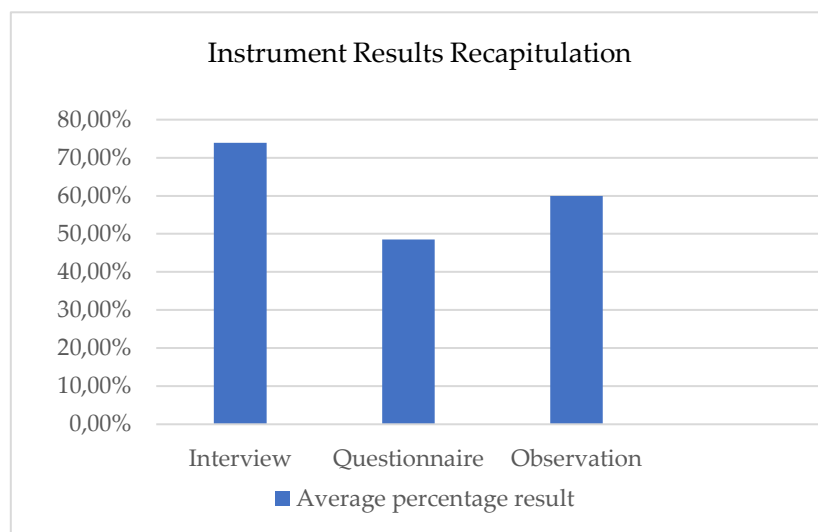
Based on the results of the questionnaire on the use of digital media and its impact on the development of character and social skills of students at Sekolah Indonesia Jeddah, it can be concluded that the duration of digital media use varies, with most students (40%) using digital media between 1-2 hours per day. As many as (60%) students use digital media for school purposes every day. Most students (70%) reported that their parents set time limits for using digital media. Regarding students' perceptions of the impact of digital media, 50% of students felt that digital media was very helpful in understanding lessons. The influence of digital media on students' social interactions showed that 40% felt that digital media strengthened relationships with friends. In addition, 30% of students felt that using digital media made them more patient and independent. In terms of social skills, 45% of students felt that digital media helped them be more courageous in speaking or communicating with others. As many as 40% of students felt that digital media helped them learn character values such as honesty, cooperation, and discipline, while 60% reported feeling more responsible in using digital media since there was supervision from parents or teachers. However, 50% of students admitted that they often felt distracted and lacked focus when studying due to the use of digital media. Overall, digital media is considered to have a positive impact on the development of students' social skills and character, although there are still challenges in maintaining focus and managing screen time.

**Table 2.** Observation results

Question	Percentage of Answers
Increased Responsibility and Discipline	70%
Independence in Learning	65%
Development of Social Skills - Cooperation	60%
Communication and Empathy	55%
Concentration and Focus	50%

During one month of observation at Sekolah Indonesia Jeddah, the use of digital media in the classroom showed a positive impact on the development of students' character and social skills. As many as 70% of students experienced an increase in responsibility and discipline, as seen from their regularity in submitting assignments digitally. In addition, 65% of students showed better independence in completing assignments without relying too much on teachers. In terms of collaboration, 60% of students were able to work together well using digital media, although the other 40% were more focused on devices than interacting directly with friends. As many as 55% of students showed an increase in communication through digital media, but only 45% showed an increase in face-to-face interaction and empathy. The biggest challenge was found in the aspect of concentration, where 50% of students experienced distractions when using digital media, which affected their focus during learning. Overall, digital media has a positive impact on responsibility, independence, and collaboration, but teachers need to ensure a balance between the use of technology and

direct social interaction so that students' communication and empathy skills continue to develop (Safwandy, Nugraha, Maskah, & Rohayani, 2023).



**Figure 4.** Instrument Results Recapitulation

Based on the results of interviews, questionnaires, and observations, the use of digital media at Sekolah Indonesia Jeddah overall has a positive impact on the development of students' character and social skills, although there are some challenges. From the interview results, an average percentage of 73.89% showed that teachers and parents agreed that digital media increases students' interest in learning, understanding of the material, and interaction, although they are also aware of the risks of distraction and dependency. The results of the questionnaire, with an average percentage of 48.5%, showed that students felt that digital media helped them understand lessons, improve social skills, and help them learn character values, but some students also reported impaired focus due to the use of digital media. Observations for one month indicated positive results with an average percentage of 60%, especially related to increased responsibility, independence, cooperation, and communication through digital media. However, distractions that interfere with students' concentration are the main challenges that must be overcome. Overall, digital media is considered useful in improving important aspects of students' character and social skills development. However, balance in its use, as well as good supervision, are needed to ensure that students can remain focused on learning objectives without being distracted by negative factors from technology.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that digital media significantly influences the development of the character and social skills of elementary school students at Sekolah Indonesia Jeddah. Excessive use of digital media tends to reduce student discipline, reduce responsibility for tasks, and reduce the quality of direct social interactions. However, if used wisely, digital media can support learning and enrich students' curiosity. The impact of digital media use on social skills is dualistic. On the one hand, digital media allows students to stay connected and communicate more widely, but on the other hand, uncontrolled use can weaken their ability to interact face-to-face and develop empathy. The social-emotional (SEL) approach has been shown to be effective in overcoming the negative impacts of digital media by helping students manage emotions, strengthen communication skills, and build healthier social relationships. The results of interviews, questionnaires, and observations showed that digital media had a positive impact on the development of character and social skills of students, with an average percentage of interviews of 73.89%, questionnaires of 48.5%, and observations of 60%. However, the use of digital media also causes impaired focus which is a major challenge that needs to be overcome. Overall, digital media supports the development of students' social and character skills, such as independence, responsibility, and



communication. To maximize its benefits, schools need to implement balanced digital media usage policies, provide good supervision, and encourage direct social interaction so that students stay focused and achieve learning goals effectively in this digital era.

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**Conflicts of Interest:** Declare conflicts of interest or state "The authors declare no conflict of interest." Authors must identify and declare any personal circumstances or interests that may be perceived as inappropriately influencing the representation or interpretation of reported research results.

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