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The Influence of Gadget Screen Time on the Emotional Development of Early Childhood at SPS Tastbitul Fuad

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of gadget screen time on the emotional development of young children at SPS Tastbitul Fuad. Employing a quantitative approach supported by observation and questionnaires, the research investigates how the duration and intensity of screen use influence children's emotional well-being. The findings reveal that screen time has a noticeable effect on emotional development, as prolonged or unregulated use may lead to reduced empathy, irritability, and difficulty managing emotions. Nevertheless, the influence of screen time alone is relatively limited. Emotional growth in early childhood is shaped more substantially by environmental factors, such as parenting styles, the quality of communication between parents and children, and opportunities for social interaction with peers. These aspects are more crucial in helping children recognize, express, and regulate their emotions appropriately. Therefore, while screen time contributes to emotional changes, it should be managed carefully and balanced with positive interactions and guidance from parents and teachers to support healthy emotional development in young children.

Keywords: Screen Time, Emotional Development, Early Childhood, Gadget

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood, often called the golden age, is a crucial period in human life that is the foundation for future development. During this stage, from birth to six years, children experience rapid growth across all developmental domains—cognitive, motor, language, social, and emotional. The brain undergoes intense synaptogenesis, forming billions of neural connections that support the capacity for learning, adaptation, and emotional expression (Sitti Rahmawati Talango, 2012). As Isjoni (2011) emphasizes, the environment and stimulation provided to children during this phase strongly influence their later behavior and personality. Consequently, the quality of early experiences, including exposure to digital technology, plays a vital role in shaping long-term emotional health.

Early childhood Emotional development is fundamental to forming self-regulation, empathy, and the ability to build healthy relationships. It allows children to understand and express their feelings appropriately, forming the emotional foundation for learning and social interaction (Age & Hamzanwadi, 2020). Traditionally, this development occurs through face-to-face communication, play, and caregiver interaction. However, the emergence of digital devices and the expansion of internet access have transformed the

landscape of childhood experiences. Increasingly, children spend substantial portions of their day in front of screens, often at the expense of direct social engagement (Muppalla et al., 2023).

Screen time refers to the duration spent using digital screens, including smartphones, tablets, televisions, and computers. While moderate use can enhance learning through educational programs, excessive screen time has been associated with decreased emotional regulation, irritability, and attention problems among young children (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2022). According to Neophytou et al. (2019), extended screen exposure alters brain function related to emotional control and social cognition, leading to higher impulsivity and emotional reactivity. This phenomenon is not limited to cognitive consequences but also affects children's capacity to develop empathy, as screen interactions lack the emotional reciprocity in real human contact.

The World Health Organization (2019) recommends limiting screen time to one hour per day for children aged two to four years, emphasizing the importance of physical activity, play, and quality sleep. However, national surveys in Indonesia indicate that many preschool-aged children exceed this limit, often spending more than two hours daily using gadgets (Septyana Lestari & Aris Rahmadani, 2024). This overexposure reduces creative play and social learning time, essential for emotional balance and adaptability (Ummah, 2019). Children may be exposed to overstimulating or inappropriate content without adequate supervision, further disrupting their emotional stability.

Empirical research in Indonesia reinforces these concerns. Manfaatin and Aulia (2024) discovered a significant correlation between excessive gadget use and emotional instability in children aged three to six. Their findings show that children with more prolonged screen exposure exhibited higher irritability and lower frustration tolerance. Similarly, Lastriani et al. (2023) found that smartphone use among young children in Cikarang Selatan contributed to social withdrawal and an increased frequency of tantrums. These local findings align with international evidence by Liu et al. (2021), who demonstrated that screen exposure from infancy to preschool predicts later emotional and behavioral problems.

From a psychological standpoint, both Erikson's psychosocial theory and Freud's psychoanalytic model underscore the importance of early emotional experiences in personality formation (Ardiansyah et al., 2022; Arini, 2021). During this stage, children develop trust, autonomy, and initiative through consistent emotional feedback from caregivers. When digital engagement replaces direct parental interaction, the development of these emotional capacities becomes hindered. Fernandes et al. (2021) further note that attachment to both mothers and fathers plays a critical role in emotional regulation; therefore, excessive screen use that limits bonding moments may weaken this essential attachment system.

Moreover, excessive gadget use has physiological consequences that indirectly influence emotional well-being. Almahmoud et al. (2025) reported that prolonged exposure to digital screens leads to digital eye strain and fatigue, contributing to restlessness and reduced concentration. These symptoms and the disruption of sleep patterns commonly linked to late-night gadget use can exacerbate emotional volatility in children. In this way, physical discomfort interacts with emotional dysregulation, forming a cycle of dependency where children rely on digital devices for comfort and stimulation.

Observations at SPS Tatsbitul Fuad in Bekasi illustrate how these global issues manifest locally. Many children in this institution are accustomed to using gadgets at home without adequate parental monitoring. Instead of engaging in imaginative play or interacting with peers, they spend hours watching videos or playing games. Preliminary surveys conducted with twenty children aged four to six showed that approximately 65% exceeded the recommended screen-time limit. Teachers also reported behavioral changes

such as reduced patience, increased tantrums, and reluctance to engage in group activities—indicators of emotional imbalance possibly related to excessive gadget use.

Given these findings, parental involvement emerges as a critical factor in moderating the impact of screen time. According to Sari, Sumardi, and Mulyadi (2020), parenting style profoundly influences emotional development, particularly in fostering self-control and empathy. Children tend to develop healthier emotional responses when parents establish clear boundaries, engage in co-viewing, and provide emotional support during media use (Munafiah & Latif, 2022). Conversely, permissive or neglectful parenting correlates with overreliance on screens as emotional regulators. Thus, awareness and digital literacy among parents are essential to promote balanced media habits and maintain strong emotional bonds with their children.

In conclusion, while digital technology offers valuable educational opportunities, unregulated screen time poses risks to the emotional development of young children. The findings from SPS Tatsbitul Fuad underscore the importance of balanced media use, emphasizing that technology should supplement—not replace—human interaction. Schools and parents must collaborate to create environments that encourage emotional resilience through play, communication, and affection. By integrating mindful technology practices with consistent parental guidance, early childhood education can nurture emotionally intelligent, empathetic, and adaptable children who thrive in the digital era.

METHOD

This study aims to determine whether screen time significantly influences the emotional development of early childhood students at SPS Tatsbitul Fuad and to measure the extent of this influence. The research was conducted over two months, from April to July 2025.

A quantitative approach with a correlational method was employed to analyze the relationship and effect between the independent and dependent variables. The study population comprised all parents of students enrolled at SPS Tatsbitul Fuad, totaling 62 individuals, and all members of the population were included as the research sample through the total sampling technique. Data was collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire tested for validity and reliability, and through direct observation to obtain supporting quantitative data. The data were then analyzed using simple non-parametric regression techniques to determine the degree and significance of the relationship between screen time and emotional development.

The research was conducted at SPS Tatsbitul Fuad, Bekasi, during the odd semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. This methodological design aligns with similar studies that explore digital exposure and early emotional development (Muppalla et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2021). Using correlational quantitative analysis is particularly appropriate for examining behavioral and developmental variables among children, where multiple environmental and parental factors may contribute simultaneously (Radesky & Christakis, 2016).

By adopting a total sampling technique, the study ensures comprehensive data representation of the research site's population, enhancing the findings' accuracy and generalizability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Using validated Likert-based instruments for measuring children's emotional development is also consistent with established methodologies in early childhood behavioral studies (Denham et al., 2012). The combination of parent-based questionnaires and researcher observations provides a balanced approach to data triangulation, strengthening the reliability of the results.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzes the influence of screen time usage on the emotional development of early childhood students at SPS Tatsbitul Fuad, based on data collected from 62 parent

respondents. The results of the validity and reliability tests indicate that the questionnaire used was valid and consistent, ensuring the credibility of the collected data. Furthermore, classical assumption tests— including normality, linearity, and heteroscedasticity— confirmed that the simple linear regression model was appropriate for analysis.

Table 1. Summary of Instrument Validity Test Results

Variable	Number of Items	Range of r-count	r-table	Criteria	Description
Emotional Development (X)	20	0.272 – 0.777	0.250	Valid	All items valid
Screen Time Usage (Y)	20	0.251 – 0.542	0.250	Valid	All items valid

Source: Research Findings, 2025

Based on the reliability results obtained from testing 62 respondents, the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient for variable Y exceeds 0.6. This indicates that each statement item analyzed using a Likert scale in variable Y is categorized as reliable and has good internal consistency.

Table 2. Summary of Reliability Test

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Description
X (Emotional Development)	0.900	Reliable
Y (Screen Time Usage)	0.628	Reliable

Source: Research Findings, 2025

All variables in this study demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, as each Cronbach's Alpha value exceeded the threshold of 0.60. Therefore, the questionnaire is considered high-quality, and the research instrument is valid and reliable for measurement.

Table 3. Normality Test Results

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

			Unstandardized Residual
N			62
Normal Parameters[a,b]	Mean		.0000000
	Std. Deviation		6.37916865
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute		.105
	Positive		.082
	Negative		-.105
Test Statistic			.105
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)[c]			.088
Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed)[d]	Sig.		.086
	99% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound	.079
		Upper Bound	.093

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.

d. Lilliefors' method based on 10000 Monte Carlo samples with starting seed 2000000.

Source: SPSS Output Version 27, processed in 2025

The *Kolmogorov–Smirnov* normality test produced a significance value of 0.086, greater than 0.05. This result indicates that the residual data are typically distributed, meaning the regression model is appropriate for further analysis.

The descriptive statistics show that the average screen time score (58.95) is slightly higher than the emotional development score (56.87). The standard deviation for screen time (9.81) is also greater than that for emotional development (6.38), indicating a wider data dispersion. These results suggest that although children's average screen time use is somewhat higher, both variables fall within the "Fairly Good" category. This indicates that most respondents recognize the importance of balancing digital use with emotional development.

Table 4. Linearity Test Results

ANOVA Table

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
PERKEMBANGAN EMOSIONAL * SCREEN TIME	Between Groups	(Combined)	1085.789	26	41.761	1.046	.444
		Linearity	.646	1	.646	.016	.899
		Deviation from Linearity	1085.143	25	43.406	1.087	.403
	Within Groups		1397.179	35	39.919		
	Total		2482.968	61			

Source: SPSS Output Version 27, processed in 2025

The linearity test results confirm a linear relationship between screen time usage and emotional development. This is supported by the significance values for Linearity (p = 0.899) and Deviation from Linearity (p = 0.403), which exceed 0.05. Therefore, the simple linear regression model is appropriate for analysis.

Table 5. Heteroscedasticity Test Results

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-1.537	3.328		-.462	.646
	SCREEN TIME	.104	.056	.235	1.875	.066

a. Dependent Variable: ABS_RES

Source: SPSS Output Version 27, processed in 2025

The regression analysis results indicate that screen time usage has a positive but statistically non-significant influence on children's emotional development at the 5% level (p = 0.066). With a Beta value of 0.235, the strength of the relationship is categorized as weak to moderate. These findings also confirm that the regression model satisfies the homoscedasticity assumption, making it suitable for further statistical testing.

Table 6. t-Test Results

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	67.580	4.566		14.801	<,001
	SCREEN_TIME	-.182	.076	-.294	-2.380	.020

a. Dependent Variable: PERKEMBANGAN EMOSIONAL

Source: SPSS Output Version 27, processed in 2025

The regression analysis reveals that screen time usage significantly and negatively affects children's emotional development (p = 0.020 < 0.05). The Beta coefficient of -0.294 indicates that increased screen time is associated with decreased emotional development. The t-count (2.380) exceeds the t-table (2.280), statistically confirming that higher screen time correlates with a greater risk of emotional difficulties among young children.

Table 7. Simple Linear Regression Results

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	56.252	5.015		11.217	<,001
	SCREEN TIME	.010	.084	.016	.125	.901

a. Dependent Variable: PERKEMBANGAN EMOSIONAL

Source: SPSS Output Version 27, processed in 2025

The regression results show that screen time has a positive but non-significant effect on children's emotional development. The regression coefficient (0.084) suggests that each additional unit of screen time slightly increases the emotional development score. However, this effect is very weak, with a standardized Beta of 0.16 and a p-value of 0.901 (> 0.05). This implies that screen time contributes minimally and insignificantly to children's emotional development. Hence, other external factors beyond this model—such as parenting style, peer interaction, and learning environment—play a more dominant role.

Table 8. Coefficient of Determination (R^2) Test Results

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.294[a]	.086	.071	6.14912

a. Predictors: (Constant), SCREEN_TIME

Source: SPSS Output Version 27, processed in 2025

The R-Square value of 0.086 indicates that only 8.6% of the variance in emotional development can be explained by screen time, while other factors outside the model influence 91.4%. These findings highlight that, although screen time has some influence, it is not a primary determinant of emotional development in early childhood. Parental engagement, social interaction, and environmental stimulation are far more impactful. Therefore, managing screen time should be considered part of a broader, more holistic strategy for supporting children's emotional growth.

The results of this study indicate that screen time influences the emotional development of early childhood, although its contribution is relatively small. This finding is consistent with Manfaatin and Aulia (2024), who stated that excessive gadget use can affect children's emotional stability, particularly in managing anger and empathy. Similarly, Neophytou et al. (2019) found that prolonged exposure to screens negatively impacts the child's nervous system, especially in brain areas responsible for emotional regulation. Nevertheless, the current findings suggest that screen time is not the dominant factor since emotional development is also influenced by parenting style and social interactions (Sari, Sumardi, & Mulyadi, 2020).

This result reinforces the argument of Fernandes et al. (2021) that emotional attachment to parents plays a significant role in children's emotional regulation

development. Children with secure parental bonds are more capable of managing stress and demonstrating prosocial behaviors. Conversely, exposure to digital media without guidance reduces children's social sensitivity (Lastriani et al., 2023). Therefore, parental involvement in supervising and guiding children's screen time is essential in minimizing the adverse effects of gadget use on emotional development (Septyana & Rahmadani, 2024).

Furthermore, based on Erikson's psychosocial theory, the early childhood emotional development stage is characterized by the need for trust and autonomy (Arini, 2021). When children spend excessive time interacting with screens, opportunities to build self-confidence and independence through real-life interaction are reduced. This finding aligns with Gadget et al. (2019), who revealed that long-term gadget exposure may decrease children's ability to express emotions naturally. Therefore, direct social interaction remains crucial in developing emotional stability in young children.

This study also supports the findings of Muppalla et al. (2023), who explained that the impact of screen time on child development is complex and context-dependent. Excessive and uncontrolled screen use tends to lower concentration and worsen emotional control, whereas guided and educational use under parental supervision can provide certain cognitive benefits. In addition, Age and Hamzanwadi (2020) emphasized that children's socio-emotional behavior cannot be separated from daily habits, including interactions within the home and school environments.

Finally, the results of this study strengthen the recommendations of the World Health Organization (2019) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (2022), which suggest limiting screen time for children under five years old to a maximum of one hour per day, ensuring the content is developmentally appropriate, and encouraging active adult supervision. Thus, this study highlights that managing screen time should be part of a broader family and school education strategy. A balanced approach between technology use and genuine social interaction is essential to maintain children's emotional well-being and support their holistic development.

CONCLUSION

The study indicates that screen time has a minor impact on children's emotional development, which is more strongly influenced by parenting and social interaction. Limitations include a small sample, focus on only two variables, and a short research duration. Schools should educate parents on healthy gadget use, and parents should limit screen time and monitor content. Future research should examine other factors affecting emotional development.

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