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# The Impact of Gadget Use on Children's Behavior in Kelinjau Ulu Village

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**Abstract**

The increasing use of smartphones among elementary school children raises concerns about the development of their social, emotional, and disciplinary behavior. This study aims to describe the patterns of device use, its impact on children's behavior, and parental supervision efforts in Kelinjau Ulu Village, Muara Ancalong District. This study used a descriptive qualitative approach with 14 informants consisting of six elementary school children, six parents, and two teachers selected using a purposive sampling technique. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results showed that children use devices primarily after school and at night to watch videos and play online games. Children who have free access to devices tend to use them for longer, interact less directly, get angry easily when restricted, go to bed later, and procrastinate on assignments. In contrast, children who receive parental supervision are more receptive to device use regulations. Supervision is carried out through time limits, agreed-upon rules, content selection, and the provision of alternative activities, although still constrained by work schedules and parents' device usage habits. These findings demonstrate the importance of consistent parental supervision and collaboration with schools in fostering healthy gadget use habits in children.

## INTRODUCTION

Handheld devices have become integral to the daily lives of children in both cities and villages. Children use smartphones to watch videos, play games, and communicate with friends. The Directorate of Family Education Development (Direktorat Pembinaan Pendidikan Keluarga, 2019) views this technology as a neutral, double-edged sword whose benefits depend on the user. Gadgets help children find learning materials but also threaten their health and development. Usage patterns determine the direction of the consequences. Family support also determines whether the device becomes a learning tool or a source of behavioral problems.

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National data shows that the use of digital devices has become widespread, extending to children. The 2024 National Socioeconomic Survey (Susenas) recorded that 72.78 percent of Indonesia's population had internet access, up from 69.21 percent in 2023, and 68.65 percent owned a mobile phone (Statistik, 2025b) A survey by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) recorded internet penetration in 2025 at 80.66 percent, equivalent to around 229 million people (Indonesia, 2025).Children are not left behind either. BPS recorded that 42.25 percent of young children (0–6 years old) will already be using mobile phones by 2025 (Statistik, 2025). The proportion increases with age, reaching 58.25 percent in children aged 5–6 years (Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia, 2024). The gap between cities and villages is almost non-existent: 43.04 percent of early childhood children in urban areas use mobile phones, while in rural areas it is 41.12 percent (Statistik, 2025). These figures show that children in villages are already familiar with gadgets from a very young age, so its impact on their behavior is worth studying.

Harlock (1980) refers to elementary school as the peer group age, a time when children desperately want to be accepted by their peers. Through group play, children learn to socialize, cooperate, and obey rules. Developmental tasks at this stage include interacting with peers, mastering physical skills for play, and developing a conscience and values. Time with friends is the primary way for children to accomplish these tasks. These opportunities diminish when children are more immersed in their mobile screens.

Several previous studies have shown that excessive gadget use affects children's social behavior. Kbarek et al., (2025) found that elementary school children who frequently use their phones tend to be apathetic, less sensitive to their surroundings, and reluctant to socialize with peers. These children also become individualistic and withdrawn. This situation worsens when usage is not limited and parents lack supervision. Jannah et al., (2021) demonstrated that these devices directly influence children's social behavior, while parental involvement and parenting styles influence how children use them.

The impact of digital devices is also evident on children's emotions and discipline.Widya et al., (2021) found that children who play with their phones for more than two hours a day are prone to irritability, disobedience, and imitation of screen behavior. These children become lazy and miss out on learning opportunities due to games and viewing. Cahyani et al., (2024) noted that the more frequently preschoolers use devices, the greater their mental and emotional disorders. The most common disorders include difficulty concentrating, being easily distracted, and experiencing unexplained anger.

Iswidharmanjaya and Beranda (2014) explain the origins of these emotional outbursts. Repeated use triggers an increase in the hormone dopamine, which regulates feelings of pleasure, making children easily addicted. Children then seek excitement from screens and become angry when their devices are removed. Long periods of use also make children susceptible to sleep disturbances. Janah & Diana, (2023) reported that gadgets impact aggressive behavior in early childhood. Kurniawati & Sutharjana, (2023) also noted their influence on the development of behavior and character in early childhood, especially when adults do not supervise their use. Similar symptoms began to appear in Kelinjau Ulu Village, Muara Ancalong District. The researchers' initial observations showed that many elementary school children hold smartphones every day, especially after school and at night. Some children borrow their parents' phones, while others already have their own. Children often gather to play online games together, but traditional games in the village are becoming rare. Some parents complained that their children have difficulty stopping and become angry when their devices are taken before the game is over.

Fatmawati (2023) reported the impact of gadgets on village children through qualitative research in Suci Village, Manyar District, Gresik Regency. Positive aspects include ease of communication, increased knowledge, and growth in children's creativity. Negative aspects include decreased psychomotor skills, difficulty adapting to learning materials, and weakened self-control due to reduced social interaction. These results indicate that village children face similar risks as city children. This rural atmosphere aligns with the research location in Kelinjau Ulu Village.

Parents play a key role in controlling these impacts (Keluarga, 2019). Recommends establishing usage agreements from the outset, prohibiting the use of mobile phones as a sedative for children, and providing engaging alternative activities. Choe et al., (2023) labeled the habit of handing over devices to calm children as digital sedation (digital pacifier Selak et al., (2025) found that fathers and mothers who were busy using their cell phones while with their children provoked anger and sadness in their children. Family supervision needs to be examined along with its impact on children's behavior.

Most research on devices and children's behavior has been conducted in urban areas, using quantitative designs or literature reviews. Qualitative studies describing children's device usage habits, their influence on behavior, and parental efforts in villages in East Kalimantan are still rare. Children's and parents' experiences in interpreting their mobile phone use have also not been described in detail. This study seeks to fill this gap through interviews and direct observations in Kelinjau Ulu Village, Muara Ancalong District. This gap gave rise to three research questions. The first relates to the device usage patterns of elementary school children in Kelinjau Ulu Village. The second examines their impact on children's social, emotional, and disciplinary behavior. The third examines parents' efforts to supervise their children. This study aims to present these three findings based on the experiences of children, parents, and teachers. The results are expected to be useful for families, schools, and village governments who support children in healthy device use.

## METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to describe the impact of gadget use on children's behavior based on the experiences of children, parents, and teachers. Moleong, (2019) explains that qualitative research aims to understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects comprehensively through verbal descriptions in natural conditions. The study was conducted in Kelinjau Ulu Village, Muara Ancalong District, in the odd semester of the 2026/2027 academic year. The research informants numbered 14 people, consisting of six elementary school children who use gadgets, six parents, and two teachers. The selection of informants used a purposive sampling technique, namely based on their involvement and knowledge of the research problem.

Data collection was conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations aimed to observe children's behavior at home and in play environments. Interviews were conducted with children, parents, and teachers to obtain information on device usage habits, social interactions, emotional responses, discipline, and parental supervision. Meanwhile, documentation was used to supplement and strengthen the data from observations and interviews by collecting documents or evidence relevant to the research focus.

The research procedure included preparation, data collection, data analysis, and report preparation. Data analysis used the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, (2014), which consists of data condensation, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions. The data obtained were grouped based on the research focus, then presented narratively to identify patterns of children's behavior in using

gadgets. Data validity was checked through source triangulation and technical triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from children, parents, and teachers, while technical triangulation was conducted by matching the results of observations, interviews, and documentation. This step was carried out to ensure the suitability and accuracy of the research data.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Researchers obtained results from observations, interviews with children, parents, and teachers, and documentation in Kelinjau Ulu Village. The description of the results follows three problem formulations. The first section describes children's device usage patterns. The second section explains their impact on children's social, emotional, and disciplinary behavior. The third section describes parental supervision efforts and their barriers. The final discussion compares the findings with previous research and child development theories. A concept map summarizes the relationships among the findings.

### A. Patterns of Device Use in Children

Smartphones are the most commonly used devices by children. Four children use their parents', while two have their own. Children generally turn them on after school, in the afternoon, and at night before bed. Frequently viewed content includes cartoons and game videos on YouTube, online games, and short videos on social media. Some children also search for homework answers or message friends using the screen. Entertainment still far outweighs educational needs.

Usage patterns differed markedly between the two groups of children. Children under parental supervision played for about one to two hours daily, as parents set the hours and monitored what they watched. Children with more freedom spent more than three hours a day with devices, even up to five hours on holidays. This group chose their own viewing content without parental supervision. Children's accounts of screen time matched those of their parents and records collected by researchers.

**Table 1. Device Usage Patterns Based on Parental Supervision**

| Aspect | Children supervised by parents | Children who have free access to gadgets |
|---|---|---|
| Device type | Parents' smartphone | Parents' smartphones and personal phones |
| Time use | In the afternoon after work finished house | After school until the night before sleep |
| Daily duration | About one to two hours | More than three hours, can reach five hours on holidays |
| Content | Cartoon videos and parent-reviewed content | Video games, online games, and short videos of your own choosing |

Table 1 shows that parental supervision significantly influences the length and content of children's viewing. Kbarek et al., (2025) noted a similar trend: the impact of gadgets becomes more severe when the duration is not limited and parental supervision is lacking. Widya et al., (2021) studied children who played for more than two hours per day and found that many learning hours were wasted on games and videos. The habit of checking their phones before bedtime in children who are free deserves further examination in the discipline section.

### B. Impact of Gadget Use on Children's Behavior

#### 1. Social Behavior

Devices are changing the way children interact with their peers. Children with free access to devices are gathering more often to play online games together. They sit close together, but their attention is focused on the screen. This group is less likely to participate in outdoor activities like soccer or traditional games. Children who are

supervised still play outside with friends in the afternoon and then use their phones after playtime or after completing homework with their parents.

Changes were also evident in children's interactions with their families. Parents of children with free access to devices reported that their children rarely chatted when everyone was at home. They preferred watching videos in their rooms rather than talking about school activities. Teachers reported that children still socialized at school, but their conversations focused more on online games played at home the previous day. These accounts illustrate a reduction in direct communication between children and family members. One informant shared this experience in the following interview.

"*Even when he's holding his phone, he doesn't even respond when called to eat. When asked about school, he gives short answers..*" (OT4)

Playing together, collaborating, and participating in social activities are developmental tasks for children at this age (Harlock, 1980). Children who spend their free time with devices miss out on opportunities to socialize through physical play (Kbarek et al., 2025). reported a similar tendency, with children becoming apathetic and reluctant to socialize. Online play still creates opportunities for interaction, but these spaces are limited to the screen. The cooperative skills developed through physical play and group activities are not honed in the same way online.

**2. Emotional Behavior**

Children's emotional responses are most evident when parents limit or stop device use. Children who are free tend to get angry, cry, or lock themselves in their rooms when their phones are taken away. Some refuse to stop, claiming the game isn't over yet. Children who are supervised are initially disappointed but more quickly accept the rules because the time allotment has been agreed upon from the start. They often ask for a little more time and then hand the phone back to their parents. Falensia, (2025) adds that children who habitually use gadgets without supervision or limits tend to show difficulty in recognizing, managing, and expressing emotions appropriately. One child shared his feelings in the following interview.

"*I get annoyed when my phone is taken while I'm playing, because it means my team loses. But if it's already eight o'clock, I have to give it to my mom.*(AN2)

Children's and parents' accounts revealed the situations that triggered these responses. Anger most often occurred when devices were taken away during online games or before a video was finished. Parents who took phones without warning were more likely to face strong resistance, while those who warned them a few minutes beforehand were less likely to face resistance. Teachers did not encounter similar emotional outbursts at school because children did not bring phones to class. Some children appeared sleepy and had difficulty concentrating during the first period.

These emotional findings align with (Widya et al., 2021), who observed that children who use gadgets become easily angered and rebellious. Safina et al., (2024) noted unprovoked anger and difficulty concentrating as the most common disorders. Iswidharmanjaya & Agency, (2014) explained that children throw tantrums when devices are withdrawn because they have become their primary source of pleasure. The greater acceptance of rules in supervised children suggests that early agreements help them manage disappointment when parents discontinue use.

**3. Discipline**

Gadget usage habits are related to how children carry out responsibilities at home. Children who are free often put off homework until the evening. Some tasks are rushed or only completed at school in the morning. They also stay up later because they watch videos or play games before falling asleep. Children who are supervised are required to complete homework before touching their devices. This regulation creates a more regular study schedule and a relatively consistent bedtime every night, including on weekends. In addition to affecting concentration, excessive gadget use also impacts student discipline (Latif et al., 2026).

Teachers' accounts corroborated these findings. Teachers observed that several students frequently submitted assignments late and appeared tired in class. These students generally came from families that did not limit device use at home. Teachers also observed students imitating words or speech patterns from videos they watched. Compliance with family rules also declined in children accustomed to unrestricted device use. Parents reported that their children often forgot to help with light household chores that were once routine, such as sweeping and washing dishes.

The discipline findings align with (Widya et al., 2021), who noted that children become lazy and lose study time due to playing with gadgets. The Keluarga, (2019) cited sleep disturbances, difficulty concentrating, and decreased academic performance as risks for children. Iswidharmanjaya and Beranda Agency (2014) also explained that prolonged use makes children prone to difficulty falling asleep. Children who sleep late often arrive at school tired, reducing their readiness to learn, especially during the first period.

**C. Parents' Efforts to Supervise Gadget Use**

Parents monitor device use in several ways. The most common approach is time limits, for example, allowing children to use their phones only after homework is completed and must be returned at a certain time. Some choose content by checking their child's viewing history. Others establish rules with their children so they know the time limits. Others plan alternative activities, such as taking their children to the garden, fishing, or playing with siblings in the yard in the afternoon after work.

Implementing these rules faces several obstacles. The main obstacle stems from working hours in the garden or fields, which often leave children unsupervised. Some parents admitted to handing over their phones to keep their children calm and not disrupt their work. They are also not accustomed to restraining themselves from using their own devices around their children. Children imitate these habits and consider prolonged use to be normal. These habits are difficult to change because parents feel they are being helped while working. However, if parents establish clear rules regarding gadget use, it can reduce children's gadget addiction (Juita & Vitaloka, n.d.). One informant explained these obstacles in the following interview.

"*We went to the garden in the morning and came home in the afternoon. The kids were always on their phones at home, so we couldn't see them.*." (OT5)

Children respond to family supervision in various ways. Children who are accustomed to agreements from the start accept restrictions well. Children who are restricted after a long period of freedom refuse, offer more time, or secretly borrow a sibling's phone. Fun substitute activities help them temporarily forget about screens. Parents rate supervision more effectively when all family members adhere to the same rules and less effectively when only one member adheres to them.

**Table 2. Parental Efforts, Obstacles, and Children's Responses**

| Effort | Form of implementation | Child's obstacles or responses |
|---|---|---|
| Restrictions time | Gadgets are used after homework completed and submitted at a certain time | Child bids for extra time |
| Election content | Parents check viewing history child | Parents don't always have time inspect |
| Agreement rule | Rules are developed with the child from the start. | Less successful if not obeyed by all family members |

| Effort | Form of implementation | Child's obstacles or responses |
|---|---|---|
| Replacement activities | Take the kids to the garden, fishing, or playing in the yard | Limited by parents' working hours in the garden or fields |
| Common problems | Cell phones are given to children to keep them calm. | Children imitate their parents' habits using a device |

The parental efforts in Table 2 align with the (Keluarga, 2019) recommendations regarding usage agreements and the provision of substitute activities. Choe et al., (2023) assessed the habit of handing over mobile phones to calm children as a digital sedative that can weaken children's ability to regulate themselves. Selak et al., (2025) examined the impact of parental mobile phones on children's emotions, and their findings align with parental habits of using devices near children. Working hours in the fields are a characteristic of rural families that should be taken into account when designing support programs.

The findings of this study indicate that the influence of gadgets on children's behavior depends on how they are used. Supervised and unsupervised children both used smartphones, but their behavior differed. This difference supports the (Keluarga, 2019) view that this technology is neutral and its consequences are determined by its users. Jannah et al., (2021) demonstrated that parental roles and parenting styles influence device use. This study demonstrated this influence through the experiences of families in Kelinjau Ulu Village, Muara Ancalong District. Sunarsih et al., (2025) also added that gadget use has a significant impact on students' social behavior, both positive and negative. Parents' roles are also crucial in shaping students' social behavior through mentoring, inviting them to participate, and controlling gadget use (Sunarsih et al., 2025).

The decline in outdoor play habits needs to be understood through the concept of age-grouping (Harlock, 1980). Elementary school children need group play to learn to socialize, cooperate, and follow rules. Online games provide a sense of community but don't fully develop physical skills and face-to-face interactions. Fatmawati, (2023) found a decrease in self-control due to reduced social interaction in village children. This study found a similar pattern and also demonstrated that substitute activities from parents can maintain children's play habits.

Children's emotional responses and discipline are interconnected. Children who use their phones late at night are more prone to anger when restricted and are more likely to neglect their duties. Widya et al., (2021) and Cahyani et al., (2024) noted similar emotional issues in children who use devices. This study adds to the picture of a trigger for anger, namely sudden device withdrawal. Warnings before time runs out and early agreements help children better accept rules. Children's and parents' accounts corroborate these findings.

Obstacles to supervision in Kelinjau Ulu Village differ from those faced by families in urban areas. Parents work in the gardens or fields from early morning, limiting their time with their children. This situation leads some parents to hand over cell phones as a distraction, even though this practice is not recommended. Establishing agreed-upon rules with their children and implemented by the entire family is the most effective form of supervision. Alternative activities like gardening and fishing also utilize the village environment, which is close to the children.




**Figure 1. Concept Map of Research Findings**

Figure 1 shows that parental supervision is a link between usage patterns and children's behavior. Long duration, use before bedtime, and entertainment content are associated with reduced direct interaction, emotional outbursts, and decreased discipline. Time limits, agreed-upon rules, and alternative activities mitigate these impacts. These findings complement previous research that generally measures the relationship between devices and behavior quantitatively. This study was limited to 14 informants: six children, six parents, and two teachers in Kelinjau Ulu Village. The limited timeframe for data collection also does not fully reflect children's daily device usage habits. Furthermore, the study focused only on children's social, emotional, and disciplinary behavior, so other aspects such as the benefits of devices in learning and long-term impacts have not been studied in depth.

This study shows that children in Kelinjau Ulu Village primarily use devices for entertainment and online gaming, with varying durations of use depending on parental supervision. Excessive device use is associated with reduced social interaction, difficulty controlling emotions, and decreased discipline. Parents' efforts to monitor device use include time limits, content selection, agreed-upon rules, and the provision of alternative activities. The success of supervision is greatly influenced by parental consistency in enforcing rules within the family.

This study has limitations because it only involved 14 informants in one village, so the findings cannot be generalized to describe the conditions of children in other areas. Therefore, parents are expected to be more consistent in guiding and supervising their children's device use. Schools and village governments also need to support positive activities that encourage children's social interaction. Future research is recommended to examine the use of devices in learning by involving a wider range of informants and research locations.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research on the impact of gadget use on the behavior of elementary school children in Kelinjau Ulu Village, Muara Ancalong District, it can be concluded that gadgets are mostly used by children for entertainment, such as watching videos, playing online games, and accessing short videos, especially after

school until the evening. The pattern and duration of gadget use differs between children who receive parental supervision and children who have more free access to gadgets. Children who are supervised tend to use gadgets for about one to two hours a day, while children who are less supervised can use them for more than three hours or even up to five hours on holidays.

Excessive device use is associated with changes in children's social, emotional, and disciplinary behavior. Socially, children tend to reduce direct interaction with friends and family and spend more time playing online games. Emotionally, children respond with anger, crying, or resistance when device use is stopped. Meanwhile, in terms of discipline, uncontrolled device use causes children to procrastinate on homework, reduce study time, sleep later, and fail to fulfill household responsibilities.

Parents' efforts to monitor device use include time limits, content selection, establishing agreed-upon rules, and providing alternative activities, such as playing in the yard, fishing, and helping with household chores. However, this supervision still faces challenges, primarily due to parents' busy schedules in the garden or fields and the habit of using devices within the family. Therefore, consistent parental supervision, school involvement, and village support are necessary to foster healthy, balanced device use habits that align with children's developmental needs.

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