

**GADGET ADDICTION AND CHANGES IN SOCIAL INTERACTIONS  
AMONG EARLY CHILDHOOD CHILDREN IN BETUNGAN, BENGKULU CITY****Sonny Desvi Hartati Isaya Putri, <sup>1)</sup>\* Linda Safitra, <sup>2)</sup> Susiyanto<sup>3)</sup>**<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu, IndonesiaAuthor: [sonyaputripart12@gmail.com](mailto:sonyaputripart12@gmail.com)**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to examine the impact of gadget addiction on changes in the social interactions of early childhood children in Betungan Village, Bengkulu City. Using a qualitative approach and case study method, data was collected through in-depth interviews and documentation, analyzed using theory of social change and symbolic interaction. The results of the study show that, on average, children spend more than four hours per day using gadgets, far exceeding the one hour limit recommended by experts. This habit has led to a decline in children's participation in group play, difficulties in understanding emotional expressions, and limitations in two-way communication. Passive stimulation from screens replaces physical activity and creative play, which are essential for fine motor development and imagination, thereby hindering socio-emotional growth. The main factors contributing to addiction include easy access to gadgets at home, app designs that make it difficult for children to detach, and a lack of alternative educational and recreational activities. In addition, the use of gadgets as a distraction tool in parenting reduces face to face interaction and emotional closeness between parents and children. A collaborative effort between families, educational institutions, and local governments is needed to set screen time limits, provide child friendly play facilities, and develop interactive stimulation programs to mitigate the negative effects of gadget addiction on the social, emotional, and cognitive development of early childhood.

**Keywords:** Social Changes, Social Interaction, Digital Technology, Addiction, Early Childhood

**ABSTRAK**

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji dampak kecanduan gadget terhadap perubahan interaksi sosial pada anak usia dini di Desa Betungan, Kota Bengkulu. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dan metode studi kasus, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dan dokumentasi, dianalisis dengan menggunakan teori perubahan sosial dan interaksi simbolik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa, rata-rata, anak-anak menghabiskan lebih dari empat jam per hari menggunakan gadget, jauh melebihi batas satu jam yang direkomendasikan oleh para ahli. Kebiasaan ini menyebabkan menurunnya partisipasi anak dalam permainan kelompok, kesulitan dalam memahami ekspresi emosional, serta keterbatasan dalam komunikasi dua arah. Stimulasi pasif dari layar menggantikan aktivitas fisik dan permainan kreatif, yang sangat penting bagi perkembangan motorik halus dan imajinasi, sehingga menghambat pertumbuhan sosial-emosional. Faktor utama yang berkontribusi pada kecanduan meliputi mudahnya akses ke gadget di rumah, desain aplikasi yang membuat anak sulit melepaskan diri, serta kurangnya alternatif aktivitas edukatif dan rekreasi. Selain itu, penggunaan gadget sebagai alat pengalih perhatian dalam pengasuhan mengurangi interaksi tatap muka dan kedekatan emosional antara orang tua dan anak. Diperlukan upaya kolaboratif antara keluarga, lembaga pendidikan, dan pemerintah daerah untuk menetapkan batasan waktu layar, menyediakan fasilitas bermain yang ramah anak, serta mengembangkan program stimulasi interaktif guna mengurangi dampak negatif kecanduan gadget terhadap perkembangan sosial, emosional, dan kognitif anak usia dini.*

**Kata Kunci:** Perubahan Sosial, Interaksi Sosial, Teknologi Digital, Kecanduan, Anak Usia Dini

## INTRODUCTION

All age groups, including young children, are encouraged to use gadgets in line with advances in information technology. According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (Sivrikova, et.al. 2020; Lestari, et.al., 2024), 33.44% of Indonesian children aged 1–6 use mobile phones or other electronic devices. Only 25.5% of toddlers (aged 0–4) use electronic devices, compared to 52.76% of children aged 5–6 (Agvaantseren & Qin 2024) . This percentage increases with age. The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (*Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia/KPAI*) also reported that 98 percent of children aged 6 to 12 own a gadget, with an average daily usage time of 6 hours and 45 minutes. According to experts, toddlers should not spend more than one hour per day using electronic devices (Yan & Yin, 2024). Children aged two to five should not use electronic devices for more than one hour per day. National data show that toddlers often spend far more time in front of screens than is recommended for their health (Zaky, et.al., 2024).

The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) also reported that 98 percent of preschool children tend to use gadgets to play games and watch videos on social media platforms such as TikTok, even though they do not yet understand the content (Al-Meida, et.al., 2024) . In their complaints, many parents explained that their children “sometimes use gadgets to play games and sometimes to engage with social media such as TikTok, even though they themselves do not understand it” (Pitayanti, et.al. 2024). Some parents even try to divert their children's attention from learning applications (such as puzzles or harmful games) so that their screen time is not entirely consumed by the child (Sadiku, 2024) . This creates an imbalance between illusion and reality: young children should be playing outdoors with equal opportunities to develop their motor, imaginative, and social skills, but in reality, they spend much of their time alone in front of screens (Neto, et.al. 2023) . This shift in play and interaction patterns raises concerns about the lack of social and physical stimulation for children during a critical stage of their development (Nasution & Litiana, 2024).

Advancements in information technology are developing rapidly, and this also applies to family life (Situmorang, et.al. 2023). Currently, devices such as mobile phones, tablets, and televisions are commonly used as learning tools in Bengkulu City, a phenomenon that is quite common, especially in urban areas. Due to a lack of self-control and limited awareness of the harmful effects of excessive device use, children aged 1–6 are more vulnerable to overusing gadgets. This can hinder children’s social, emotional, communication, and even fine motor development.

One place where people of all ages, including adults and children, are introduced to and use electronic devices is Betungan Village. It is known that the use of electronic devices affects children's social interactions and has both positive and negative consequences. As a result, researchers are interested in exploring further how early socialization is influenced by gadget use (Hayat, 2024). To understand the impact of technology and changes in social relationships among children in Betungan Village, the researchers conducted a study.

The research will review several previous studies and identify relevant topics related to the study to be conducted. The purpose of this literature review is to provide a basis for comparison and a reference point. In addition, it aims to avoid the assumption of similarity with the current research. Therefore, in this literature review, the researchers present several studies with similar themes that have been conducted by previous researchers, explained one by one.

First, Toni Nasution et.al., (2022) conducted a study titled "The Effect of Gadget Use on Social Interaction Skills in Early Childhood." The main focus of this study was to describe how gadget use by young children can affect the development of their social interaction skills. The findings indicated that most children primarily used gadgets for playing. As a result, children who initially enjoyed playing with their peers could shift to relying on gadgets as a substitute for playmates. Next, the second study was conducted by Nurliana Apsari et.al., (2023) on "The Impact of Gadget Use on the Social Behavior of Early Childhood Children." This study aimed to identify the influence of gadget use, particularly on the social behavior of young children. The social behavior of early childhood children is affected by the use of electronic devices. The findings indicate that the social behavior of young children related to gadget use can be observed in how they cooperate, respect others, share, and help other.

Neither of these two studies utilized sociological theories to examine the phenomenon in depth. Therefore, this presents a gap for the current research to explore the issue further using sociological theories, specifically child and digital sociology. The findings of this study can be theoretically beneficial by contributing to child sociology and digital sociology, particularly regarding gadget addiction and changes in social interactions among early childhood children in Betungan Village, Bengkulu City. Practically, the results can serve as recommendations for relevant institutions in efforts to address gadget addiction and changes in social interactions among young children in Betungan Village, Bengkulu City.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

To understand gadget addiction and its impact on the social relationships of early childhood, this study uses a qualitative approach with an interpretative paradigm analysed using

the theory of social change and symbolic interaction (Umiarso & Ebadiansyah, 2014; Ritzer & Goodman, 2010). According to Creswell, qualitative research is a method that collects descriptive data in the form of words, both spoken and written, as well as relevant behaviours (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Because this method can explore subjective experiences and uncover deeper meanings within specific social contexts, the qualitative method was used to provide a comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon of gadget addiction in childhood. A descriptive case study was the research method employed, enabling the researcher to contextually evaluate specific field situations. Informants were selected using purposive sampling and snowballing techniques to identify parents or guardians of children who exhibited signs of gadget addiction, such as excessive use and reduced social interaction (Moleong, 2017).

The data collection techniques were carried out through interviews, non-participant observations, and documentation at the research site in Betungan Village. To enhance the validity of the results, the triangulation technique was employed for data analysis. Data were analysed using the Miles and Huberman model, which involves data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions to uncover patterns of meaning and social interactions (Hardani, 2020). The sociological framework of symbolic interactionism theory was used to understand how young children create social meaning through their interactions with technology and their social environment, particularly in the context of interpreting digital symbols and nonverbal cues during routine interactions with parents and their surrounding social environment.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Gadget Addiction Causes A Child's Emotional State To Become Uncontrollable**

Gadget addiction is a condition in which an individual has an excessive dependence on digital devices, such as computers, tablets, or smartphones (Yawale, et.al. 2023). This condition is characterized by an uncontrollable persistence in using gadgets despite their negative effects on daily life. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition, there are several symptoms of gadget addiction, such as tolerance (requiring more time to use gadgets) and withdrawal (feeling anxious when gadgets cannot be used fully). Although interaction is essential for human existence, this also applies to children who do not interact with others (Putra, 2022). Definition of social interaction: According to Homans, interaction is an event in which one individual acts toward another individual through the actions performed by the other individual, in which case the individual partner is rewarded, granted, or influenced

(Johnson, 2021) . According to the human concept, an action performed by one individual that attracts the attention of the other is called interaction (Enayat, 2022) . The relationship between two or more people, in which one person's behaviour influences, changes, or is influenced by the behavior of others, is called social interaction. Interaction is an action performed by one individual that attracts the attention of another individual who is their partner (Hidayat, 2024). Social interaction is defined as a relationship between two or more individuals in which the behavior of one individual influences, modifies, or is influenced by the behaviour of another individual.

According to Al Munawaroh et.al. (2023) that Early childhood is a period of remarkable growth and development. Children are at a stage of life where they frequently interact and communicate with new people in their environment. According to several studies, children greatly enjoy playing and interacting directly (Bauminger-Zviely, 2021) . When with their peers, children often become absorbed in their own gadgets, paying little attention to their surroundings (Pitayanti, et.al., 2024). One of the many changes brought about by electronic technology is the social behavior of children (Febriani, et.al. 2024). Children who excessively use gadgets and are left alone for extended periods should not be excluded from this possibility (Putra, 2022). The term “goldenes Zeitalter” is often used to describe the stage of rapid development experienced by children between the ages of one and six. During this period, a child's brain development reaches approximately 80% of its full potential. Therefore, laying the foundation for future development is greatly supported by early childhood education (Safira & Hidayah, 2022). Humans cannot be forced to act like social beings who only engage in trivial conversations, never listen, and never share information. Small talk can sometimes be important for gaining additional insights. When faced with a problem, people will always seek support from parents, friends, siblings, or other close individuals to find the best solution, relax, and feel better (Yushko, 2022).

A comprehensive overview of the impact of digital technology development on family life, particularly among children, can be obtained from research on gadget addiction and changes in social contact among early childhood in Betungan Subdistrict. Based on observations and findings, interviews with parents and other informants, including caregivers and other family members, revealed that children aged between 1 and 6 years use gadgets more frequently than recommended by child health experts. Children in Betungan Subdistrict spend an average of more than four hours a day on their gadgets, primarily for playing games, watching cartoons or short films, and viewing videos on social media platforms such as TikTok. Furthermore, several studies have shown that children addicted to gadgets experience

a decline in their creative imagination and fine motor skills (Astriana, et.al. 2024). Passive screen activities have gradually replaced active outdoor activities such as playing soccer, cycling, or playing in the sand. Physical and social stimulation is essential for the development of children's basic life skills during the golden phase of brain development. A lack of physical activity and direct interaction impacts children's motor and social skills, and these effects can persist into school age and adulthood. Children's dependence on technology also affects the parent, child relationship. When asked to play or study, many parents report difficulties and a lack of response from their children.

Direct interaction and emotional closeness between parents and children are increasingly diminishing as both rely more on technology for entertainment or educational purposes. This situation illustrates how technology has shifted from being merely an educational tool to substituting the parental role in educating and caring for children. An interpretive method was employed to capture the meanings assigned by children, parents, and caregivers to gadget use, not only as a form of entertainment but also as part of a social process that shapes identity, emotions, and modes of interaction. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to delve into the subjective world of these individuals. Consequently, this study does not merely observe surface-level behaviours but also seeks to understand how children use digital technology to make sense of their surroundings.

In today's digital era, gadget addiction among children has become an increasingly concerning issue. Excessive use of electronic devices not only disrupts children's study time or outdoor play but also harms their emotional development. When these devices are taken away, even during mealtime or naptime, children who overuse them may become extremely angry, scream, break things, cry uncontrollably, or even threaten their parents. Such children often struggle to control their emotions.

*According to Mrs. Eni (35) "It is true that children addicted to gadgets experience unstable emotional conditions. Children who are accustomed to instant entertainment and quick responses from screens often struggle to cope with situations that require patience." (Interview, 2024).*

*Mrs. Tiara (30 years old) stated that her child often loses emotional control. "He starts screaming, kicking the table, throwing objects, and even hitting himself or others when the phone is taken away, even during lunchtime." (Interview, 2024).*

*Mrs. Evi (36 years old) said "A child's hysterical behavior can be extremely excessive, such as crying loudly while screaming and being inconsolable, even rolling on the floor," (Interview, 2024).*

Therefore, providing guidance to children addicted to electronic devices requires

attention from parents and the immediate family to control behavioral patterns related to electronic device use. This can be achieved through various strategies, such as establishing device usage rules, limiting internet access, determining the duration of device use, rewarding or punishing children for achievements or negative behavior, and directing them to physical activities outside the home. Reasons why children are not negatively affected physically and psychologically (Fahrizal, 2024; Bassam & Qalawa, 2022).

Otherwise, uncontrolled behavior and emotions can emerge in these children. Ms. Rani (29 years old) said:

*“Just because they are not allowed to play games or watch movies for longer, children become angry and unable to control their emotions, without considering the consequences of their actions. They often scream, kick doors, or throw objects when given simple instructions, such as to take a bath or have a nap.” (Interview, 2024).*

Children are less capable of handling situations that require patience and self-control because their brains are accustomed to the instant and fast-paced stimulation of digital content. In addition, children also struggle to understand and manage their own emotions, as well as the emotions of others, when they have limited direct interaction with their parents and classmates.

Mrs. Rega (33 years old) *“Instead of going outside to play with other children, he prefers to stay at home and play games on his phone every day. He often shows no concern when his friends cry or get upset while playing with him, and sometimes even mocks or provokes them. He becomes annoyed if things don’t go his way and refuses to share when it’s his turn to play. He also has difficulty communicating because, as if uninterested, he often withdraws or only gives short answers when someone asks him something.” (Interview, 2024).*

Children who spend more time playing with gadgets than playing with friends outside tend to have lower empathy and struggle to adapt to their surroundings. This happens because he has never learned to read facial expressions, understand other people’s feelings, or negotiate through social play. Gadgets provide him with a controlled world of his own, so when he is in the dynamic environment of school, he becomes overwhelmed and appears rigid, selfish, and isolated. Based on symbolic interactionism theory, gadget addiction disrupts the process by which children interpret the world through social interaction. Children who interact more with screens than with parents or friends lose the opportunity to learn to read facial expressions, tone of voice, and other social cues. As a result, when the gadget is taken away, the child cannot express frustration verbally or rationally, and instead reacts with anger, hysterical crying, or hitting, because the screen has become the only symbol that gives them satisfaction.

The lack of real-life interaction makes it difficult for children to control their emotions, reduces their empathy, and increases impulsiveness, as they no longer learn that their actions have consequences in the real social world.

### **Gadget Addiction Isolates Children From The World of Play**

Children addicted to gadgets prefer spending their time playing games, watching videos, or browsing the internet rather than playing with their friends or going outside for physical activities. As a result, they become disconnected from the world of play, which should be an essential aspect of their development. Play is a crucial part of a child's growth as it teaches them how to interact with others, improves motor skills, and fosters creativity. Examples include playing ball, hide-and-seek, and spending time at the playground (Salna, 2024). However, due to the lack of adequate and safe play areas in their neighborhoods, many children increasingly choose to play with electronic devices, especially in the research location. Article 22 of Law Number 23 of 2002 on Child Protection requires the government and the state to provide infrastructure and facilities to facilitate child protection. A children's playroom is a service that offers a space for children whose parents are fighting for justice. To ensure that children can enjoy their playtime and experience the happiness that should be their fundamental right, they are provided with a dedicated play space. For children who have to endure hardships due to their parents' divorce, childcare service rooms can at least serve as psychological therapy by allowing them to play without having to see their parents waiting in the court's waiting area (Montillano & Pondi, 2022).

This was stated by Mrs. Eni, particularly regarding the children in Betungan Village, *“the lack of appealing recreational options that could support their social development is due to the absence of public facilities such as playgrounds, open spaces, or child-friendly recreational areas. As a result, children now mostly use electronic devices to fill their free time, replacing direct play and face-to-face interaction with their classmates.”* (Interview, 2024).

Mrs. Tiara added, *“Due to the lack of adequate and safe play areas in their surroundings, children choose to play indoors. They have no comfortable place to play with their friends because there are no parks or playgrounds. Consequently, their main source of entertainment has shifted to electronic devices. This growing dependence on screens, coupled with the lack of social interaction and isolation from the outside world, hinders children's social development and accelerates addiction.”* (Interview, 2024).

This situation needs to be addressed seriously by the government and relevant institutions by providing playgrounds or green open spaces for children. One way to prevent gadget addiction in children is by engaging them in play that stimulates their physical and

psychological well-being. Children who play have been shown to experience changes in regular sleep patterns, social interactions with peers, and interactions with parents, which in turn reduces their gadget addiction (Satria, et.al. 2024).

If there are no playgrounds, green spaces, or city parks, children are more likely to be drawn to gadgets. So, playing with gadgets can also be considered an escape because there are no other alternatives.

Mrs. Rega stated, *“Since there are no parks or public spaces for children to play, they are forced to rely on electronic devices as their only source of entertainment. As a result, children interact less with others, engage in fewer physical activities, and become increasingly dependent on screens. It is hoped that in the future, local governments will take proactive measures to create accessible and child-friendly play areas, as well as involve families and schools in reducing gadget use. This way, children can grow and develop in a balanced manner by actively playing in the real world, maintaining good social skills, and avoiding being confined to a virtual world.”* (Interview, 2024).

According to Adit (5 years old), *“I don’t like playing outside, especially during the day when it’s hot.”* (Interview, 2024).

In fact, the government has mandated that parks and playgrounds should be available for children in every district. Unfortunately, in reality, many areas lack such facilities, especially in urban regions, due to limited land availability or a lack of interest from local authorities. Consequently, children are deprived of attractive and comfortable outdoor play spaces. As a result, they turn to technology for entertainment, which ultimately reduces their interaction with peers. Children become more introverted, less active, and face difficulties in social interaction, accelerating their dependence on gadgets. Therefore, in addition to parents’ responsibility to monitor their children’s use of technology, the government must take its duty more seriously by providing safe and comfortable play areas for children in every region. In this way, children can once again experience a balanced and healthy play environment, avoiding being trapped in an isolated virtual world. According to symbolic interaction theory, children addicted to gadgets are disconnected from the world of play because they lose the opportunity to learn social skills through face to face communication.

This theory emphasizes that children learn social norms, body language, and facial expressions through playing with peers, which is the only way for them to develop self-awareness and a full understanding of the world. However, children in Betungan Subdistrict do not have a place to experience this process due to the lack of suitable and safe playgrounds. In a digital environment, social symbols are not mutually understood by children merely receive stimuli without having to negotiate, take turns, or respond to others’ emotions. As a result, gadgets have replaced playgrounds as the main source of enjoyment. Because they

never learn to interpret and assign meaning in the context of genuine relationships, children eventually become shy, less empathetic, and struggle with social interactions. As parents have observed, technology has replaced all other options, leaving children isolated from essential social interactions. In line with symbolic interaction theory, children's self-development is hindered, and the outside world feels unfamiliar to them in the absence of meaningful interactions.

### **Changes in The Language and Symbols Used By Children During Interactions**

Children's communication has been significantly impacted by the rapid growth of electronic devices, online games, and other technological advancements. The use of language and symbols by children clearly changes when they interact with peers and adults. The term "*tung tung sahur*", Originally used to describe the tradition of inviting guests for pre-dawn meals during Ramadan, the term is now often used in various contexts. Teenagers employ it in casual conversations and games, even as jokes or taunts. This phenomenon indicates that as the contextual meaning of these terms diminishes, the younger generation begins to misuse them in broader social contexts. Furthermore, in the world of online gaming, children often use insulting terms such as, "*Anjai*", "*Noob*", "*Pala kau*", "*Sok tau lu*", "*Goblok*" and similar terms.

*According to Mrs. Rani (29 years old) "Although they do not understand the actual meaning, children use these terms while playing or chatting. These terms, often used for teasing or joking, originate from digital content, such as viral videos or conversations in online games. Children imitate them without understanding the context or impact because they are regularly exposed. Over time, even when interacting with parents or teachers, this language becomes part of their everyday conversation." (Interview, 2024).*

*Mrs. Evi added, "My child used to run around in front of the house with friends, but now, after having a phone, he can sit quietly for hours. He now becomes angry, cries, or even rolls on the floor if not given the device. The fact that his language has changed is even more concerning. He used to be polite, but now he often uses phrases he clearly learned from online games, including "anjay," "noob," and "palak kau." When he is upset, he sometimes says the phrase "tung-tung sahur," even though it is not intended as an insult. Since he does not understand that these terms are inappropriate, especially when speaking to parents, we, as parents, feel confused." (Interview, 2024).*

From these informants, it is clear how gadgets significantly influence children's behaviour, speech, attitudes, and emotions. Rude, disrespectful, and often offensive language are logical consequences of what is frequently seen and heard through these devices. Therefore, the role of parents and counselors is crucial in guiding and influencing children to

manage their time and even watch positive content through gadgets (Fatichah & Madywati, 2023; Hermawan & Kudus, 2021).

*Mrs. Rega stated, "My child's speech patterns have developed. Nowadays, when children feel upset, they tend to laugh and use inappropriate terms such as "Anjai" a term that actually originates from the gaming world. They just imitate it without understanding the meaning, and even use it in conversation with their parents". (Interview, 2024).*

*Raka (6 years old) said, "I use terms like "anjai" and "goblok" from the games FF and ML because my friends often use them." Ame (4 years old) said, "I often say tung tung sahur and sok tau lu from watching videos on TikTok and YouTube." (Interview, 2024).*

They believe that speaking in this manner has become normal. This change is caused by children becoming increasingly unaware of social norms and language use. Language, which should serve as a means of polite and meaningful communication, gradually turns into a tool for nonsensical jokes and teasing. This shift can hinder children's ability to communicate politely and effectively if parents and educational environments do not take action. To ensure that children continue to understand the importance of using appropriate, contextually suitable language and maintaining politeness in both online and real-life interactions, parents and teachers must provide guidance and direction. According to symbolic interactionism theory, children's use of language and symbols develops as a result of meaning-making based on interaction, albeit in an inappropriate context. This idea suggests that through direct interaction with others, children exchange symbols such as words, expressions, and actions, which help them develop social awareness and understand the world.

However, children in the Betungan Village study interacted more frequently with screens than with other people, so the symbols they absorbed came from the virtual world rather than the real social environment. The children imitate phrases that carry cultural connotations or are used exclusively in gaming contexts, such as "tung tung sahur," "anjay," "noob," or "palak kau," without understanding their social context or meaning. Because these expressions are often met with laughter or applause in the digital world, adolescents perceive them as a legitimate form of communication and use them in real life interactions with peers, teachers, and even parents. According to symbolic interactionism theory, this indicates that toddlers now passively imitate uncontrolled content rather than developing their self-identity through constructive social interactions. As a result, communication is disrupted, children lose the ability to distinguish between online and offline norms, and they remain unaware that the language they use can be offensive or inappropriate. Children lack the social input that helps

them develop an understanding of language ethics when they do not engage in sufficient direct interaction. Consequently, the role of language as a structured and meaningful form of communication is replaced by symbols from electronic devices.

The results indicate that children aged between one and six years old use electronic devices for more than four hours a day, far exceeding the one hour daily limit recommended by experts, according to research on gadget addiction and changes in social interaction among children in Betungan, Bengkulu City. This behavior negatively impacts children's social, emotional, and communication development. Children struggle to understand emotional expression, cooperate, and share because they become less socially engaged and prefer playing with electronic devices at home to interacting directly with their peers. Children addicted to devices also struggle to regulate their emotions. When their devices are taken away, they often become angry, cry uncontrollably, or even attack or destroy objects. This disruption occurs because their brains are unable to handle situations that require patience, as they are accustomed to the instant stimulation of screens. The lack of direct social interaction also hinders children's ability to read facial expressions and understand the emotions of others, resulting in reduced empathy and making it difficult for them to adapt to rapid social changes. Excessive technology use also changes their communication styles.

Due to the negative impacts of gadget use as a consequence of social change, parents need to actively guide and control their children. This can be done by 1) limiting gadget use time, 2) being selective in choosing gadget applications for children, 3) accompanying children in gadget use, 4) training children to be responsible, and 5) interacting socially. However, there are also positive impacts of gadget use, namely increasing knowledge, expanding friendship networks, and facilitating communication. While the negative impacts of gadget use include ignoring parental instructions, addiction, and decreased concentration in learning (Hidayatulakdia, 2021).

They begin using rude terms derived from online games or social media content, such as TikTok, including “*anjay*,” “*noob*,” “*goblok*,” and “*sok tau lu*.” Even parents and teachers sometimes use these terms impulsively without understanding their social context or meaning. This indicates that language comprehension is disrupted, with digital symbols replacing language’s role as a means of polite and meaningful communication. Easy access to gadgets at home, app designs engineered to keep children engaged through virtual rewards and notifications, and the lack of safe and stimulating play areas in the surrounding environment are major contributors to gadget addiction. Parents often use gadgets as a distraction, replacing

face-to-face communication and emotional closeness in child rearing. Gadget addiction can hinder a child's development if not properly addressed. Limiting screen time, creating child friendly play areas, and providing alternative activities that encourage social and physical stimulation require collaboration between parents, schools, and the government. The negative impacts of gadget addiction can be mitigated with appropriate support, enabling children to develop in a balanced way in both the real and digital worlds.

## CONCLUSION

In Kelurahan Betungan, gadget addiction among young children has significantly impacted their speech abilities, social skills, and emotions. Young children spend more time using electronic devices than playing directly with their peers. They have fewer opportunities to learn social interaction, become more withdrawn, and struggle to regulate their emotions. Children's vocabulary has also changed; for example, they now use harsh terms from online games in everyday situations. Due to limited time and insufficient supervision, parents' efforts to restrict gadget use often fail. As a result, electronic devices act as temporary caregivers, increasing children's dependency. Gadget dependence can hinder children's social and emotional development if not properly managed. To prevent children from becoming overly reliant on technology, parents must take a more active role in managing screen time, offering healthy activities, and setting boundaries for device use.

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