

Social-Emotional Development of Elementary School Children in the Digital Era: A Systematic Literature Review

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Keywords

Social emotional development, elementary school children, digital era, literature review, character education, digital technology, social interaction, empathy, parenting, school programs, smartphone use, digital literacy.

Abstract

This study aims to examine the impact of digital technology advancements, especially online-based learning, on the social-emotional development of elementary school children. This study seeks to understand the challenges and opportunities in supporting children's social-emotional skills in the midst of changes in social interaction patterns due to digitalization. This study uses a systematic literature review method by searching databases such as Google Scholar and Mendeley. Relevant articles from 2019–2025 were selected based on specific inclusion criteria, then analyzed with a thematic synthesis approach to identify key themes regarding children's social-emotional development in the context of the digital age. The results of the study show that the social-emotional development of elementary school-age children is strongly influenced by family support, social value-based school programs, and the use of technology. A supportive family environment, the implementation of programs such as the Adiwiyata School, and real social interaction have been proven to support children's emotional regulation, empathy, and social skills. Conversely, excessive use of technology, especially smartphones, can inhibit social skills, decrease empathy, and increase emotional dependence. This study has limitations because it only uses secondary data from the reviewed articles, so the generalization of results depends on the quality of the available literature. In addition, variations in cultural backgrounds in the reviewed studies limited the widespread application of the results. These findings emphasize the importance of the active role of families, teachers, and communities in balancing the use of technology and improving the quality of children's social interactions. Practical implications include the importance of character education, the establishment of a healthy digital literacy culture, and the integration of social-emotional programs in the elementary school curriculum. This research enriches the discourse on children's social-emotional development in the digital era, by highlighting the importance of synergy between the family environment, school, and the wise use of technology. This study also opens up space for the development of education policies that are more adaptive to the challenges of digitalization in elementary school-age children..

1. Introduction

Social-emotional development in children is the ability to interact and respond to something and behave according to societal norms (Dabis, 2019).. Social-emotional development in children is important and cannot be underestimated, especially in children of elementary school age (Ainun et al., 2023). This aspect plays a crucial role in shaping children's personality and ability to interact with the surrounding environment. Children who have good social-emotional skills tend to be better able to manage emotions, empathize, and establish positive relationships with others. Meanwhile, children who do not have adequate experience in interacting with others tend to have low social-emotional skills (Saptandari et al., 2022). This is especially important when children begin to learn to interact with peers and adults. These skills not only support individual development, but also contribute to the child's mental health and social well-being in the future.

Digital technology is electronic devices, tools, systems, and resources that are used by every individual to process or store data as well as do many other things (Maharana & Acharya, 2024). Technological advances have brought significant changes in social interaction patterns. With the advent of social media and digital communication platforms, the way children interact with each other has changed. While technology provides ease of communication, there are risks that arise, such as reduced face-to-face interaction and negative impacts on social skills. Children may be more comfortable communicating virtually, but this can hinder the development of important social skills in real life. Reliance on technology can reduce an important part of their social development.

In the context of education, it is important to experience how technological advances affect the way children learn and interact. Educators and parents need to realize that while technology can be a useful tool, in-person interaction remains very dizzying for a child's social-emotional development. Therefore, creating a balanced environment between the use of technology and face-to-face interaction is key to supporting children's growth. Activities that encourage collaboration and direct communication can help children develop better social skills.

In addition, the challenges faced in children's social-emotional development in the digital era also require special attention. For example, children who are exposed to negative content or *bullying* behavior in cyberspace may experience a significant impact on their mental health. As such, it is important to provide adequate education on digital ethics and healthy ways to interact in cyberspace. With the right approach, children can develop the social skills necessary in daily life.

Although there have been many studies that have discussed the impact of technology on children's academic achievement, there is still little research that specifically highlights how online learning and the use of digital technology systematically affect the social-emotional development of elementary school children. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining various relevant studies to provide a comprehensive picture of the impact and strategies of children's social-emotional development in the digital era

Overall, children's emotional development and adaptation to technological advances are two interrelated aspects. By understanding and addressing the challenges that arise, we can create a generation that is not only academically intelligent, but also has strong social skills. It is an important investment for the future of our children and society as a whole, which will shape individuals who are able to contribute positively in their social environment.

2. Method

This study uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to collect and analyze various sources of information relevant to the topic of social-emotional development of elementary school children in the digital era. The literature search process is carried out through electronic databases such as Google Scholar and Mendeley, by applying inclusion criteria in the form of articles published in the range of 2019 to 2025 and specifically discussing the social-emotional aspects of children in the context of the use of digital technology.

The researcher managed to identify as many as 26 articles that corresponded to the time span and topic of the study. Of these, 21 articles were considered relevant to the focus of the research. Furthermore, further screening was carried out and 15 articles were obtained that specifically discussed the problem of bullying in elementary schools. Of the 15 articles, 8 of them offer different approaches and solutions in handling bullying cases, so as to make a diverse contribution to understanding and handling children's social-emotional issues in the digital era.

The selected articles were analyzed using a thematic synthesis approach to identify patterns, categories, and relationships between various factors that affect children's social-emotional development. The selection process and article categorization strategy are further explained in Table 1 below.

Tabel 1. Article Selection Strategy

No.	Discussion Categories	Search Engines	Search Results
1.	Search year 2019-1015	Publish or Perish	26
2.	Relevant titles		21
3.	Presenting different solutions		8
	Results discussed		8

3. Results and Discussion

They should be combined. The study results should be clear and concise. Restrict the use of tables and figures to depict data that is essential to the message and interpretation of the study. The results should be presented in a logical sequence in the text, tables and illustrations. The part of result exposes the findings obtained from research data which is related to the hypotheses. The results should summarize (scientific) findings rather than providing data in great detail. The discussion should explore the significance of the results of the work. Explains the findings obtained from research data along with theory and similar research comparison. Make the discussion corresponding to the results, but do not reiterate the results. The following components should be covered in discussion: How do your results relate to the original question or objectives outlined in the Introduction section (what/how)? Do you provide interpretation scientifically for each of your results or findings presented (why)? Are your results consistent with what other investigators have reported (what else)? Or are there any differences?. Include in the discussion the implications of the findings and their limitations, how the findings fit into the context of other relevant work, and directions for future research.

The social-emotional development of elementary school-age children is an important aspect that contributes to the formation of their personality. At this stage, children begin to learn to recognize and manage their emotions, as well as understand the feelings of others. The definition of social-emotional includes the ability to interact with others, build healthy relationships, and develop empathy. Indicators of social-emotional development can be seen from children's ability to communicate, collaborate, and resolve conflicts. This can be done through social interaction with peers. Additionally, interaction with adults can help children understand and manage their emotions by providing emotional support, teaching social skills, and providing the guidance necessary for healthy emotional development (Nadia et al., 2023). Children who have better social-emotional skills tend to be more able to adapt to their social environment, have high self-confidence, and are able to manage stress more effectively.

From various articles, researchers grouped and mapped their thoughts. The thematic analysis of these articles can be summarized through the following table.

Tabel 2. Results of Article Acquisition

No.	Article Title	Writer	Year	Study Method	Research Results
1.	Social and Emotional Development in Elementary School Children	L. Gultom, B. Berlianti, F. Ritonga	2023	Group work	Social and emotional learning in elementary school through the social group work method increases the confidence, ability to interact, and emotional stability of children aged 7-11 years, thereby supporting their mental development positively.
2.	Emotional and Social Development in Elementary School-Age Children	Inspiration	2020	Qualitative	The social and emotional development of elementary school children is closely interrelated; Children learn to control themselves and build social relationships as the basis for future success.
3.	The Role of Social Interaction in Elementary School Children's Emotional Development	Deni Okta Nadia et al	2023	Qualitative	Social interaction with peers, teachers, and family shapes a child's ability to recognize, manage, and express emotions positively.
4.	Social-Emotional Development of Elementary School Students	Ainun Lathifah et al.	2023	Qualitative	Social-emotional development greatly determines the academic and social success of elementary school children; influenced by the condition of the student, the family environment, the learning process, and developmental conflicts.

5.	Children's Social, Emotional, and Moral Development, and Their Implications for the Formation of Social Attitudes of Elementary School Students	Ani Siti Anisah et al.	2022	Qualitative	Elementary school-age children are aware of social, religious, racial, and social status roles; Educational stimulus and a healthy environment form positive social attitudes such as responsibility, cooperation, and sportsmanship.
6.	The Influence of Parental Parenting on the Social-Emotional Development Aspect of Grade III Elementary School Students	Martha Rumbarak & Gamaliel Airlanda	2023	Quantitative	Parental parenting has a negative effect on the social-emotional development of grade III elementary school students; Harsh, authoritarian, or permissive parenting worsens the child's social emotional development.
7.	Adiwiyata School Program in Socio-Emotional Development of Elementary Children at SDN Ngapasan Yogyakarta	Muhammad Majdi	2019	Descriptive qualitative	The implementation of the Adiwiyata School Program at SDN Ngupasan Yogyakarta has succeeded in developing the socio-emotional development of elementary school children, so that children are able to control emotions, work together, be responsible, responsive, caring, independent, and have better confidence.
8.	Analysis of Smartphone Use on the Development of Emotional Character of Grade III Elementary School Students in Pancur Mayong Village, Jepara	Arindah Isro Ahadiyah et al.	2023	Qualitative	The use of smartphones has a positive impact (increasing communication) and negative (sleep disturbances, dependence, emotional outbursts, reduced empathy) on the emotional character of grade III students.

The findings of various studies show that children's social-emotional development is greatly influenced by factors of the home environment, school, and the use of technology. Strong social support from the family is the main foundation in shaping children's social skills and emotional stability (Nadia et al., 2023). The school environment also plays an important role in supporting this development through interaction with teachers and peers (Ainun et al., 2023).. A loving and supportive family environment provides children with the opportunity to express their emotions freely, thus creating a solid foundation for emotional development (Siti Anisah et al., 2021). Children who are able to recognize, understand, and manage their feelings from an early age have a greater chance of achieving social welfare (Ilham, 2020).

In the school environment, the implementation of collaborative programs such as the Adiwiyata Program has been proven effective in increasing empathy, sense of responsibility, and cooperative skills among children (Siti Anisah et al., 2021). The implementation of the Adiwiyata School Program at SDN Ngupasan Yogyakarta has also succeeded in developing the socio-emotional development of elementary school children, so that children are able to control emotions, work together, be responsible, responsive, caring, independent, and have better confidence (Program et al., 2019).. An inclusive school environment further strengthens children's positive social attitudes and adaptation skills (Gultom et al., 2023). The application of social group work methods in social and emotional learning increases the self-confidence, social interaction skills, and emotional stability of children aged 7–11 years, supporting positive mental development (Gultom et al., 2023).

Social interaction with peers and teachers contributes greatly to shaping children's emotional regulation and social relationship skills (Nadia et al., 2023). In addition, learning experiences in social environments support the development of children's adaptability in various situations (Ainun et al., 2023). However, authoritarian, permissive, or inconsistent parenting can hinder a child's emotional development. Children raised with such parenting show difficulties in self-control and low

empathy (Rumbarak & Airlanda, 2023). Therefore, the implementation of a responsive and balanced parenting style is essential to support healthy social-emotional development.

In the context of the use of technology, the use of smartphones has a double impact on children. On the one hand, smartphones facilitate access to information and communication (Arindah Isro Ahadiah et al., 2023). But on the other hand, over-reliance on smartphones can lead to emotional outbursts, sleep disturbances, and decreased empathy (Arindah Isro Ahadiah et al., 2023). Consistent character education from an early age has been proven to strengthen positive social attitudes such as a sense of responsibility, honesty, sportsmanship, and concern for others (Siti Anisah et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important to create a balance between the use of technology and real social interaction. The active involvement of family, school, and community is a key factor in building optimal social-emotional development of children (Ilham, 2020).

In general, the social environment and collaborative learning have proven to be the main supports in supporting the emotional regulation of elementary school children. Social interaction between children and peers, teachers, and parents provides a wide space for children to learn to recognize, express, and manage their emotions positively. This is reinforced by findings from various studies in this study that show that involvement in group-based learning activities—such as social group work—can increase children's confidence, cooperative skills, and emotional stability. An inclusive school environment and the implementation of value-based programs such as Adiwiyata School also form an attitude of responsibility, empathy, and social concern. Therefore, creating a collaborative and relational learning atmosphere is the key to shaping children's social-emotional skills in the midst of the challenges of the digital era.

3.1 Conclusion

The social-emotional development of elementary school children in the digital age is influenced by various factors, including parental parenting, school programs, and technology use. Positive support from the surrounding environment is essential for developing children's social and emotional skills. In an increasingly digitized world, children need guidance that focuses not only on the academic aspect, but also on the formation of character and social skills. A supportive family environment, active involvement of teachers in schools, and the use of controlled and wisely directed technology are effective combinations to support optimal child development. Creating a balance between the use of technology and real social interaction is the main key in shaping an emotionally and socially healthy generation. The role of schools in integrating social value-based learning programs, such as the Adiwiyata Program, has been proven to strengthen children's empathy, responsibility, and cooperation. On the other hand, a nurturing approach that prioritizes affection is accompanied by clear boundaries, capable of building a strong emotional foundation.

Author Contributions

This research enriches understanding of the importance of a holistic approach in supporting the social-emotional development of elementary school children in the digital era. The study highlights the need for collaboration between parents, teachers, and the school community to create an environment conducive to children's development. In addition, these findings provide a basis for the formulation of education policies that are more responsive to the challenges of child development in the digital era.

Funding

The results of the study show that the social-emotional development of elementary school-age children is strongly influenced by family support, social value-based school programs, and the use of technology. A supportive family environment, the implementation of programs such as the Adiwiyata School, and real social interaction have been proven to support children's emotional regulation, empathy, and social skills. Conversely, excessive use of technology, especially smartphones, can inhibit social skills, decrease empathy, and increase emotional dependence.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

In addition, it is important to educate children about the healthy use of technology from an early age. Parents and teachers need to set a good example and build a critical and ethical digital literacy

culture. Children should be directed to use technology as a tool to learn, communicate positively and develop their potential, not as a means of escape from real social interaction. Therefore, collaborative efforts between schools, families, and communities are essential to form an ecosystem that supports children's social-emotional development. Investing in strengthening this aspect not only provides short-term benefits to individual well-being, but also contributes to the creation of a more empathetic, harmonious, and resilient society in the future. By understanding the complexity of the challenges in the digital age and taking proactive steps, we can ensure that children grow up to be a generation that is not only capable of competing in the global world, but also has strong emotional and social integrity.

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