

The Influence of Digital Media on Elementary School Students' Communication Ethics and Character Education Strategies by Teachers at SD Negeri 01 Pakembaran

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Abstract

The transformation of elementary school students' communication styles has become increasingly evident amidst the rapid and unstoppable influx of digital information. Social media, online videos, and other entertainment content influence how students speak, behave, and respond to their surrounding environment. This study aims to analyze the influence of digital media on elementary school students' communication ethics and to explain teachers' strategies in shaping polite and courteous communication character. This study utilized a descriptive qualitative approach through in-depth interviews with the Grade V teacher at SD Negeri 01 Pakembaran. The findings indicate that the influence of digital media leads to the emergence of unethical communication behaviors, such as speaking in high tones, interrupting, using harsh language, and a lack of empathy. The strategies implemented by the school encompass the habituation of character values, teacher role modeling, integration into learning activities, and collaboration with parents. This study reinforces that character education in communication ethics must be carried out in an integrated and consistent manner between the home and the school to confront the negative impacts of digital media on children's behavior.

Keywords: Character education, Communication ethics, Digital media, Elementary school students, Teacher roles.

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of information and communication technology brings a major influence on human life, including elementary school-aged children. Nowadays, elementary school students are no longer strangers to social media, online videos, and online games. Easy access to various digital content leaves students more exposed to communication styles that do not always reflect the norms of politeness in Indonesian culture. Children quickly emulate the speech styles of internet celebrities, animated characters, and netizens' comments which are often harsh, sarcastic, or even insulting.

This phenomenon has become an important concern in the world of education because communication is an essential part of shaping students' character and self-identity. Children learn to know themselves, build social relationships, and develop critical thinking skills through communication. Therefore, when communication ethics are disrupted due to the negative influence of digital media, other aspects of development are also affected. According to Santrock (2012), during the elementary school age period (6–12 years), children are in a stage of social development that is heavily influenced by the environment and learning experiences. Children are highly sensitive to what they see and hear, and they tend to mimic behaviors that catch their attention. Without proper guidance, children can absorb inappropriate communication patterns, which are subsequently reflected in their daily interactions both at home and at school.

It cannot be denied that digital media also provides educational benefits if used wisely. In reality, however, many students access content without the supervision of parents or teachers. This causes them to be more exposed to popular entertainment that disregards ethics, such as comedy shows with harsh language, sarcastic comments on social

media, and even video games with aggressive characters. Lickona (2012) emphasizes that character education must encompass teaching how to speak well, respecting the interlocutor, and expressing opinions politely. In practice, however, character education regarding communication frequently has not become the primary focus in schools. This is further exacerbated by the lack of supervision and guidance for children when accessing digital content at home. Thus, it is crucial for schools to take an active role in forming moral and responsible communication ethics, as well as establishing synergy with families.

In this context, the teacher's role as a role model, facilitator, and moral guide is highly vital. Teachers do not merely teach subject matter, but are also responsible for shaping noble values within students, including how to speak and behave politely in a social environment. This effort requires planned and sustainable strategies, whether in learning activities, daily interactions, or cooperation with the students' families.

METHODS

This study utilized a descriptive qualitative research design to investigate the influence of digital media on students' communication ethics and the corresponding character education strategies implemented at SD Negeri 01 Pakembaran. Data collection was executed through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the Grade V teacher as the primary informant, alongside empirical fieldwork involving behavioral observation journals and evaluation documentation. The gathered qualitative data were analyzed using a thematic analysis framework, which entailed transcribing field data, open coding, and synthesizing findings into four core thematic axes: the manifestation of digital media influences on student behavior, specific typologies of impolite

communication, tactical pedagogical strategies (encompassing habituation, modeling, and individual guidance), and school-family collaborative frameworks. To establish analytical rigor, the emerging field insights were systematically cross-referenced and triangulated with established theoretical literature on socio-behavioral developmental psychology and contemporary digital literacy models.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Digital media plays a significant role in shaping the communication behavior of elementary school students. Based on the results of interviews with the Grade V teacher at SD Negeri 01 Pakembaran, it was found that many students mimic the speaking style of digital content from platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and online video games. They frequently use words or expressions that do not conform to politeness norms, such as interrupting the teacher while speaking, raising their voice when expressing an opinion, or even speaking harshly to their classmates. This phenomenon indicates that students absorb communication patterns observed in digital content and replicate them in real life. Palfrey and Gasser (2008) mention that digital generation children tend to regard online communication as their primary reference point, rather than traditional social interaction. Unfortunately, the majority of the popular content they consume does not teach proper and polite speaking ethics.

Furthermore, digital media also affects students' emotional expressions. Several students demonstrate reactive behaviors, such as becoming angry when corrected or remaining silent as a form of rejection. Tapscott (2009) explains that the digital generation often lacks depth in interpersonal communication because they are more accustomed to instant and

excessively expressive communication. Consequently, students are unaccustomed to active listening, show a lack of respect for the opinions of others, and struggle to deliver criticism in a courteous manner. The teacher conveyed that the communication behaviors emerging at school are quite diverse, yet dominant patterns exist. These include speaking in high tones to the teacher when disagreeing, interrupting conversations when the teacher or a peer is speaking, using words such as "stupid," "crazy," "none of your business," and looking away when reprimanded. In addition, there are also students who speak while playing around or fail to answer when spoken to.

This behavior not only demonstrates the negative influence of digital media but also points to a lack of politeness habituation at home. Yusuf (2015) emphasizes that children at the elementary school age are highly prone to emulating communication patterns from their immediate environment. Thus, if they are not habituated to speaking properly at home, they will highly likely repeat the same behavior at school. A social environment that is permissive toward harsh language and disrespectful attitudes will reinforce such habits. To confront these challenges, the teacher at SD Negeri 01 Pakembaran consistently implements several character education strategies. Daily habituation, such as greeting, smiling, and welcoming (3S) every morning, is conducted to foster polite habits from the moment students arrive at school. This activity also builds a positive emotional atmosphere so that students feel valued and psychologically secure.

Weekly character education programs are carried out every Friday. In this activity, students are engaged in light discussions regarding moral values and courtesy in daily life, including how to speak properly to teachers and peers. The teacher links the

discussion themes with real events occurring at school so that students feel more engaged. Integration into the learning process is also key. During group discussions or presentations, the teacher exemplifies polite phrases such as “In my opinion...”, “May I respond...”, or “I agree with your opinion, but...”. Teacher role modeling is an essential part of this strategy because students can easily emulate the concrete behavior they observe every day.

Individual guidance is also provided to students who exhibit deviant behavior. The teacher does not immediately administer punishments but prefers a personal approach to understand the background of the behavior. This strategy not only corrects behavior but also builds a relationship of trust between the student and the teacher. These strategies align with the concept of character education according to Lickona (2012), who states that moral values can only be effectively instilled through habituation, positive reinforcement, and exemplary modeling. Teachers must become consistent role models in speech and action, and be capable of creating a classroom climate that fosters mutual respect.

The teacher emphasizes the importance of cooperation with parents in shaping students’ communication ethics. Children who are accustomed to being spoken to courteously at home generally apply the same behavior at school. Conversely, if they frequently hear harsh words or high speech tones at home, that tendency will be carried into the learning environment. Therefore, the teacher encourages parents to control the digital content consumed by their children and habituate proper communication within the family environment. A concrete form of this cooperation includes routine parent-teacher meetings (school committee), providing education on digital parenting, and reporting

the development of student behavior at school.

Zubaedi (2011) states that ideal character education involves synergy among the school, home, and community. If the family and school environments are aligned in instilling good communication values, a consistency that reinforces comprehensive student character building will be created. Furthermore, the reality that digital media is double-edged beneficial yet hazardous demands that teachers and schools do not merely block students’ access to media, but rather equip them with digital literacy skills and critical thinking capabilities. Digital literacy encompasses an understanding of communication ethics in digital spaces, awareness of the impact of words, and the ability to select content worthy of emulation. Teachers can integrate these topics into Indonesian Language, Pancasila Education, or cross-subject projects that emphasize polite communication practices (Rohmah, 2021).

Additionally, it is important for schools to create safe spaces for communication practice, such as teacher-facilitated classroom discussion forums, character ambassador programs, and polite debate competitions. A school environment that provides space to express opinions openly yet politely will reinforce the internalization of communication ethics values. In this regard, support from the school principal and the educational management team is highly required so that the character reinforcement program possesses sustainability rather than being a merely incidental activity. No less important, a local culture-based approach can also serve as an alternative strategy that reinforces character education. For instance, teachers can use folklore, proverbs, or local wisdom in learning to instill courtesy values in communication. Utilizing relevant local culture will help students feel closer

emotionally and understand that character values have long been part of their community identity (Hidayat, 2019).

To optimize the formation of communication ethics in the digital era, cross-sector cooperation is required. Schools can establish partnerships with educational content provider institutions, non-governmental organizations focusing on media literacy, or creative teacher communities. This collaboration can produce engaging and targeted learning resources, as well as enrich the teacher's instructional approaches in the classroom (Suparno, 2017). Finally, evaluations of the implemented strategies must be conducted periodically. Evaluation is not limited to student behavior but also includes the extent to which positive changes occur within the school's communication culture. Engaging students in self-reflection, teacher observations of classroom dynamics, and parental perception surveys can form part of an effective and participatory monitoring system.

Furthermore, curriculum adjustments that support character integration into all subjects are highly recommended. The government through the Ministry of Education and Culture can provide guidelines for character-based learning, particularly in the digital era. The Kurikulum Merdeka actually provides flexible space for teachers to develop contextual learning, although not all teachers have utilized it maximally (Kemendikbud, 2022). In other words, reinforcing communication ethics in the educational world cannot solely rely on normative approaches but needs to be supported by learning innovations, cultural interventions, and strong community synergy. Only then will communication ethics education truly be able to answer the challenges of the times while shaping resilient and civilized individuals both in media usage and in daily life.

As tangible evidence of the influence of digital media on students' communication ethics, the Grade V teacher at SD Negeri 01 Pakembaran provided concrete examples during the interview. A student once interrupted the teacher's explanation using a speaking style that mimicked their favorite YouTuber, complete with intonation and slang vocabulary that did not conform to politeness norms. On another occasion, several students used terms like "noob," "not my level," or "just skip it," which they learned from online games or online entertainment content. Such language is considered normal in the digital world, but when used in the classroom, it disrupts the learning process and reduces the quality of interaction among students.

The teacher also observed that the tendency to speak without considering the feelings of the interlocutor has increased. For example, during group discussions, several students demonstrated an indifferent attitude toward the differing opinions of their peers and even uttered phrases like "that makes no sense" or "what are you even saying?" without realizing that such remarks could hurt their friends. This situation reinforces the argument that communication ethics need to be instilled through habituation and direct learning.

In response to these conditions, the school implements character reinforcement policies with evidence of habituation activities such as greeting teachers in the morning, weekend classroom reflections, and the "One Polite Sentence Every Day" program which encourages students to write down one polite sentence and read it aloud in front of the class. This program has proven effective in building positive habits and increasing students' awareness regarding the importance of words in social interactions (Wahyuni, 2020). Beyond daily activities, the teacher also reported that behavior journals are filled out every week, in which students

record their experiences when communicating with peers, teachers, and parents. From these journals, the teacher can evaluate whether students are making progress in the use of polite and empathetic language. This evaluation helps the teacher in designing further approaches that are more personal according to student needs.

The implementation of this strategy also receives support from parents, who are involved in monthly parenting activities at school. In this forum, parents are equipped with materials on how to provide good communication examples at home, including avoiding verbal altercations in front of children, responding to children's questions patiently, and monitoring the digital media content consumed by children daily (Gunawan, 2021).

With the existence of such practical evidence, it can be concluded that the formation of students' communication ethics is insufficient through theory alone, but must involve repeated real-life experiences, reinforcement from various parties, and periodic in-depth evaluations. This approach turns the character education process into an integrated system, rather than a merely symbolic activity with no real impact.

CONCLUSION

The rapid development of information technology brings a major influence on the communication ethics of elementary school students. Digital media has become the primary source shaping speech styles that frequently do not conform to courtesy values. This study demonstrates that elementary school students often mimic communication styles from social media without an adequate understanding of social norms, which results in a decline of politeness in school interactions. Nevertheless, schools maintain a strategic role in guiding students' communication

behavior through structured and sustainable character education strategies. Teachers at SD Negeri 01 Pakembaran demonstrate that positive habituation, moral value-laden learning, role modeling, and synergy with parents are the keys to shaping ethical student character. In confronting the challenges of the digital era, schools cannot work in isolation. Active support from parents and the broader community is highly required to provide exemplary modeling and supervision over children's communication behavior. Children need to be guided when accessing information, given space to express themselves politely, and encouraged to build empathy in communication. Character education, particularly regarding communication ethics, must become an integrated part of the curriculum, school culture, and the relationships among teachers, students, and parents. Through a comprehensive and consistent approach, it is expected that the younger generation will grow into individuals who are not only academically competent but also courteous in their attitude and communication in both the real and digital worlds. Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the influence of digital media on elementary school students' communication ethics is a vital issue that cannot be ignored. Digital media has shaped new communication patterns that sometimes contradict the courtesy values within the local culture. Students tend to mimic speaking styles from digital content, leading to the use of harsh words, high tones, and lack of empathy in interactions, both with teachers and peers. However, these challenges are not absolute if schools and families can collaborate intensively in guiding children. Teachers hold a vital role in reinstating communication ethics values through habituation, role modeling, reflection, and contextual learning activities. Meanwhile, parents at home are expected to reinforce these values through

positive communication and supervision of children's digital media consumption. Through collaboratively designed and continuous strategies, the formation of student character in communication aspects can be effectively realized. This study also demonstrates the importance of tangible evidence in the form of school activities such as the "One Polite Sentence Every Day" program, student behavior journals, and monthly parenting sessions as concrete implementations of character education. The existence of this field data reinforces the argument that character education is not merely a discourse but must be realized in daily actions. Moving forward, it is expected that schools can continuously update their approaches and innovations in character learning, particularly those touching upon communication aspects and digital media usage. The government is also expected to provide full support through curriculum policies, teacher training, and the provision of character-based learning resources that are contextual and engaging. Consequently, efforts to foster a younger generation that is not only digitally capable but also courteous in communication can be achieved comprehensively and sustainably.

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