# Moral Education Strategies For Early Childhood In the Digital Age

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the impact of digital technology, especially gadgets, on the moral and moral development of early childhood in the digital era and formulate appropriate moral education strategies to overcome its negative impacts. This research uses qualitative research methods with a triangulation approach. Data is obtained through literature studies from various sources such as books, articles, and related journals. Data are obtained from literature relevant to the discussion. An in-depth analysis was conducted to understand the impact of digital technology on the moral and moral development of early childhood. The discussion results show that digital technology, especially gadgets, can hurt early childhood's moral and moral development. These negative impacts include technology addiction, decreased quality of social interaction, and lack of opportunities to learn moral and moral values. Therefore, the proper moral education strategy needs to be implemented. Recommended strategies include managing technology use time, setting a good example, supervising content children can access, getting used to interacting directly, teaching good moral and moral values, and involving children in social and humanitarian activities. By implementing these strategies, it is hoped that children can develop positive behaviors and reduce the negative impacts that may arise due to the use of digital technology.
**Keywords: Education strategy, Early childhood, Digital age**

## A. INTRODUCTION

The development of the times brings significant changes in the mindset and lifestyle of humans. One of the aspects that most influenced the development of the times was the advancement of technology, information, and communication. The existence of the digital world has significantly impacted human life. However, along with its positive impacts, the digital era also brings adverse effects that need serious attention.

The digital revolution has changed how humans communicate, work, and interact. Digital technology offers convenience and efficiency in various aspects of life (Castells, 2011). On the other hand, excessive and uncontrolled use of digital technology can negatively impact children and adolescents still in the developmental stage (Twenge & Campbell, 2018).

Children and teenagers today are growing up in the digital age, where they are exposed to technology from an early age. Gadgets such as smartphones, tablets, and other digital devices have become inseparable in their daily lives (Beyens et al., 2018). Although digital technology brings many benefits in terms of access to information and entertainment, excessive use can lead to problems such as addiction, decreased quality of social interaction, mental health disorders, and decreased academic achievement (Ulfah, 2020).

The negative impact is a change in human behavior, especially in children and adolescents. Children today tend to be more fixated on the use of gadgets, such as mobile phones, which have a significant influence on their mindset and behavior. Excessive use of gadgets, especially in early childhood, has led to various unwanted behavioral changes (Nurhasanah & Yudha, 2023).

One of the main negative impacts of gadget use in early childhood is addiction. Children who are too often exposed to gadgets, such as mobile phones and tablets, tend to become addicted and find it difficult to control their use (Sugiarti & Andyanto, 2022). This addiction can interfere with children's daily activities, including learning, interacting with the surrounding environment, and playing outdoors. According to research by the American Academy of Pediatrics, children who spend long hours in front of screens tend to experience problems in terms of sleep, concentration, and aggressive behavior.

Technology addiction in children can also cause behavioral and emotional problems. Research published in the journal Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking found that children who spend more time with technology have a higher risk of experiencing behavioral problems, such as hyperactivity and inattention, and emotional issues, such as anxiety and depression (Feng et al., 2017).

However, the challenges faced in educating children are becoming increasingly complex due to the dominance of negative influences from digital technology, especially gadgets. The impact of digital technology often replaces the critical role of the surrounding environment, such as family and school, in shaping the character and morals of children (Kurniawan, 2017).

Seeing the negative impact caused by the use of gadgets in early childhood, the right educational strategy is needed to overcome the problem. Moral education strategies for early childhood in the digital era must be developed to overcome this problem.

Discussing moral education strategies for early childhood in the digital era is very important. This article will discuss these issues in more depth, provide a better understanding

of the use of digital technology in early childhood moral development, and provide strategies that can be applied to overcome these challenges.

1. **Lawrence Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development**

Lawrence Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory is an essential foundation for designing moral education in the digital age for early childhood. According to (Kohlberg, 1984), moral development is through three levels: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. At the pre-conventional level, children tend to view morality from a personal point of view and adherence to rules. At the conventional level, they begin to pay attention to social norms and expectations of others. They can understand more abstract and universal moral principles at the post-conventional level. Therefore, moral education needs to pay attention to the stage of moral development of children and provide an appropriate approach to shaping their moral consciousness.

In the context of moral education, an approach appropriate to children's moral development level becomes very important. Early childhood tends to be at the pre-conventional or the beginning of the conventional level (Erviana & Nugraha, 2023). Therefore, moral education needs to be adapted to their moral understanding, which is still in its early stages. Moral education can more effectively shape early childhood moral awareness in the digital era by paying attention to this stage.

Considering Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development, moral education for early childhood in the digital age can be designed to be appropriate to the stages of children's moral development (Toha-Sarumpaet, 2010). Through the right approach, children can more easily understand moral values and internalize them in daily behavior to form a solid foundation for their future moral development.

2. **Media Ineffectiveness Theory**

This theory states that the media has a uniform influence on all individuals and depends on individual and situational factors (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). It indicates that the impact of digital technology on early childhood moral development may vary depending on the context in which it is used. In the context of early childhood moral education in the digital age, digital technology can be effective, depending on how the technology is used and regulated. For example, digital technology can be used to present educational content that supports the development of moral values, such as stories of kindness, cooperation, and empathy.

In addition, regulating the use of digital technology also plays a vital role in shaping its impact on children's moral development. According to (Sugiarto & Farid, 2023), parental supervision and thoughtful regulation of the content children access can help reduce the negative impact of digital technology on their moral development. Parents can ensure that digital technology becomes a tool supporting early childhood moral formation by setting time limits and the types of content that can be accessed.

In the context of moral education for early childhood in the digital age, understanding this theory can help design effective educational strategies. By considering individual and situational factors, moral education can be tailored to each child's needs and ethical development (Rohmawati & Watini, 2022). Thus, digital technologies can be used productively to support the moral formation of early childhood, as long as their use is wisely regulated and accompanied by proper supervision from parents and teachers.

### 3. Jean Piaget's Constructivist Learning Theory

(Piaget & Inhelder, 1972) They are emphasizing the importance of active experience in learning. According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, early childhood learns through direct experience with their environment. In the context of early childhood moral education in the digital era, direct interaction with digital technology can be a constructive learning experience. However, this experience needs to be well directed by adults to provide maximum benefit for the moral development of children (Marzuki et al., 2011).

Early childhood moral education in the digital age requires a wise approach to the use of technology. Adults, such as parents and teachers, are essential in directing children's interactions with digital technology. With proper guidance, digital technology can be an effective means of shaping a child's moral consciousness. Therefore, adults must ensure that a child's interaction with digital technology is entertaining and provides valuable moral lessons (Zuchdi, 2011).

In addition, direct interaction with digital technology can also help early childhood children understand moral concepts more concretely. Through various digital media, children can be exposed to stories, games, and other activities reinforcing moral values such as kindness, cooperation, and empathy. Thus, digital technology can effectively support early childhood moral education, provided responsible adults use it wisely.

## B. METHOD

In this study, the author used qualitative research methods. Qualitative research refers to reading results (library research), where relevant literature is collected, processed, analyzed, and formulated (Murdiyanto, 2020). Thus, it can be arranged and assembled into a perfect sentence structure.

Qualitative research methods are used to examine the state of objects naturally. Researchers became the main instrument in this study. For data collection, researchers used a triangulation approach. Triangulation is a multi-method approach used by researchers to collect and analyze data. This approach allows researchers to understand the phenomenon under study from different points of view, thus obtaining more accurate conclusions (Moleong, 2017). By using different points of view, researchers can ensure the correctness of the data received. Triangulation is an attempt to verify the correctness of data or information in a way that reduces as much as possible irrelevant or unnecessary data.

In collecting data, researchers use literature literature, such as books, magazines, articles, and other reading materials relevant to the discussion. The data found is then recorded and analyzed in depth. From this analysis, researchers can draw accurate conclusions to be used as research data. Thus, this qualitative research method allows researchers to understand the topic under study deeply.

## C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
### 1. The Importance of Moral Education Strategies for Early Childhood in the Digital Age

Young children are increasingly exposed to technology in the rapidly growing digital era, especially mobile phones and other digital devices. Excessive and uncontrolled use of technology can hurt children's moral development (Reid Chassiakos et al., 2016). Therefore, moral education strategies for early childhood in the digital era are essential.

Early childhood children today spend more time with mobile phones than interacting with the surrounding environment, including parents and peers. More interaction with digital technology than direct social interaction can hurt children's moral development.

A lack of in-person social interaction can cause children to have difficulty developing critical social skills, such as empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution (Agusniatih & Manopa, 2019). In addition, children also risk losing the opportunity to learn moral and moral values that are usually taught through direct interaction with parents and the surrounding environment.

A study by the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) found that excessive use of digital technology in children can lead to a decrease in the ability to empathize and understand the emotions of others (Uhls et al., 2014). It can undoubtedly hurt children's moral and moral development in the long run.

In addition, other studies also show that children exposed to too much digital technology tend to have lower levels of attention, difficulty controlling emotions, and less care about the surrounding environment (Christakis, 2019). It can make children less sensitive to moral and moral values that should be taught through healthy social interaction. Some of these negative impacts include:

a. Technology Addiction: Children tend to be addicted to mobile phones and other digital devices, thus neglecting other, more valuable activities, such as learning and social interaction (Twenge & Campbell, 2018).

b. Decreased Quality of Social Interaction: Children overexposed to technology tend to have a low quality of social interaction because they are more comfortable communicating through a mobile screen than directly (Domoff et al., 2019).

c. Lack of Respect and Obedience to Parents and Teachers: Children who are too fixated on digital technology oft pay little attention to advice and direction from parents and teachers (Griffiths et al., 2014).

Moral education in early childhood has a role in shaping children's character and morals. It is becoming increasingly important in the digital age because children today are exposed to various information and content that is not always positive through digital technology. Children are vulnerable to influences that can affect their moral and moral development in an environment filled with gadgets, the internet, and social media. Therefore, the following reasons for character and moral formation:

a. Shaping Children's Character: Good moral education will help form children's character from an early age (Berkowitz & Bier, 2007). Children with good morals tend to better adapt to the surrounding environment and have better relationships with others.

b. Cultivating Moral Awareness: Moral education will help children understand the difference between good and evil so that they can make the right decisions in everyday life (Lickona, 1992).

c. Reducing the Negative Impact of Digital Technology: With good moral education, children will be better able to control the use of digital technology and reduce its negative impact on their development (Kabali et al., 2015).

d. Building a Moral Generation: Children who receive good moral education in childhood tend to carry these values into adulthood to form a more moral and responsible generation (Kurniawan, 2017).

## 2. Moral Education Methods for Early Childhood in the Digital Age

In the digital era, moral education for children in the household becomes a complex challenge. Children interact more with mobile phones than their parents (Ulya et al., 2021). Children's attention to cyberspace is often greater than their attention to advice and direction given by parents (Ndraha et al., 2022). This phenomenon is an alarming reality in domestic life.

With the rapid advancement of digital technology today, parents are also affected. Parental interaction with mobile phones is also increasing, so sometimes children feel disappointed because they do not get enough attention from their parents (Hatch, 2011). As an illustration, a mother asked her child about her goals, but the child replied that her goal was to become a mobile phone. This incident surprised the mother and made her ask her child further questions. The child explained that mobile phones are good because everyone likes them, including his mother, who is more often engrossed in mobile phones than giving attention when children are in need.

This illustration should teach parents to pay more attention to their children, especially in moral education. Moral education for children requires sufficient time and patience (Suhartono & Yulieta, 2019). However, in this digital era, children's moral education is becoming increasingly difficult because children are often introduced to mobile phones as a tool for play and entertainment from an early age. This habit makes it difficult for children to be educated and nurtured correctly. They tend to pay more attention to mobile phones than listening to parents' advice and direction.

Appropriate methods are needed to overcome children's moral education challenges in the digital era. Here are some techniques that can be applied in the process of teaching and moral formation in children:

a. *Uswah* Method (Exemplary)

The Uswah, or exemplary method, is the most appropriate way to educate children's morals. As the first figures in a child's life, parents set an example through their words and deeds. Parents' examples are essential because their words and deeds become a benchmark for forming children's morals (Mustofa, 2019). If a child has bad morals, it will return to their parents because their parents' morals influence children's morals. The saying goes, "The fruit falls not far from the tree." A child's good and bad morals depend on the parents' morals.

The exemplary method is also emphasized in Islamic teachings. The Muhammad saw. He was sent by Allah (Swt.) as a good role model for humanity. He succeeded in preaching, educating, and guiding humanity to become people of faith, knowledge, morality, and high civilization. With noble morals, the Muhammad saw. Became an example for humanity, as stated in the Qur'an Surah Al-Ahzab verse 21:

Translation:

لَّقَدۡ كَانَ لَكُمۡ فِي رَسُولِ ٱللَّهِ أُسۡوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرۡجُواْ ٱللَّهَ وَٱلۡيَوۡمَ ٱلۡأٓخِرَ وَذَكَرَ ٱللَّهَ كَثِيرࣰا

21. Indeed, in the Messenger of Allah, there is an excellent example for you (that is) for those who hope for (the mercy) of Allah and (the coming) of the Day of Judgment and who remember Allah a lot.(Kementerian Agama RI, 2009)

b. *Riyadhah* Method (Habituation Exercise)

Rasulullah applies the method of habituation saw in educating children. He accustoms children to basic manners, such as eating and drinking etiquette and praying before and after bed. He also accustoms children to carry out the obligation to pray from an early age so that when they grow up, they are accustomed to it, and it is easy to carry it out (Syah, 2019).

c. Method *Mauidhah* (Advice)

The Mauidhah method or advice is the conveyance of truth and virtue to invite the person being advised to keep away from danger and direct them to a good path. Advice and warnings must be delivered in a way that touches the heart and moves learners to practice it (Sakdiyah, 2018). In the context of children's moral education, good advice should always be given to children so that what they hear can enter their hearts and move them to practice it in everyday life.

d. *Qishah* Method (Storytelling)

Storytelling is a very effective learning method, especially for preschool-age children (Tambak, 2016). Children can understand good and evil concepts through stories, recognize moral values, and strengthen their imagination and creativity.

By applying these four methods, it is hoped that children can still have noble morals in this sophisticated digital era. Early moral cultivation in children will help them socialize with the surrounding environment in the family, school, and community. Children will get used to behaving according to the religious values instilled by parents.

**3. Moral Education Strategy for Early Childhood in the Digital Age**

Moral education strategies for early childhood in the digital age need to be carefully designed to overcome the negative impacts of using digital technology. Here are some strategies that can be applied:

a. Managing Technology Use Time: The first step in overcoming the negative impact of using digital technology is to manage the use time. Parents must set clear time limits for children to use gadgets like mobile phones and tablets. This time limit can be adjusted according to the age and needs of the child; however, in general, (Council on Communications and Media, 2016) Recommends a maximum time limit of 1-2 hours per day for early childhood.

b. Set a Good Example: Parents and teachers play an essential role in shaping children's morals. Therefore, they need to set an excellent example in using digital technology. Parents must avoid excessively using gadgets in front of children and prefer interacting directly with them (Mandviwala, 2020).

c. Supervise Child-Accessible Content: Parents must actively supervise content children can access online. They need to install safety filters and set parental controls on children's gadgets to prevent them from accessing harmful content, such as violence, pornography, and gambling (Wisniewski et al., 2017).

d. Get used to interacting directly: Parents must get children used to interacting directly with others. They must invite children to play outdoors, join social activities, and communicate with their family and friends without using gadgets (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2019).

e. Teaching Good Moral and Moral Values: Parents and teachers must actively teach children good moral and moral values. They must set good examples in their behavior, teach children to respect others, be honest and responsible, and empathize (Khaironi & Yuliastri, 2017).

f. Involving Children in Social and Humanitarian Activities: Parents and teachers must also include children in social and humanitarian activities. They need to invite children to participate in social activities, such as blood donations, fundraisers for disadvantaged children, and other activities that can help them develop empathy and concern for others (Yogman et al., 2018).

Some recommended strategies include timing the use of technology, setting a good example, supervising content that children can access, getting used to interacting directly, teaching good moral and moral values, and involving children in social and humanitarian activities. By implementing these strategies, it is hoped that children can develop positive behaviors and reduce the negative impacts that may arise due to the use of digital technology.

## D. CONCLUSION

The discussion results show the importance of moral education strategies for early childhood in the digital era. Uncontrolled use of digital technology can hurt children's moral and moral development. Young children spend more time with mobile phones in the digital era than interacting with the surrounding environment. It can result in them having difficulty developing social skills and losing the opportunity to learn moral and moral values that should be taught through direct interaction with parents and the surrounding environment. Therefore, the proper moral education strategy needs to be implemented. Moral education methods that can be applied include the uswah (example) method, the *riyadhah* method (habituation training), the *mauidhah* method (advice), and the *qishah* method (storytelling). In addition, moral education strategies for early childhood in the digital age need to be carefully designed, and some recommended strategies include managing technology use time, setting an excellent example in its use, supervising content that can be accessed by children, getting used to interacting directly, teaching moral values and good morals, and involving children in social and humanitarian activities. By implementing these strategies, it is hoped that children can develop positive behaviors and reduce the negative impacts that may arise due to the use of digital technology.

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