

Impact Analysis of TikTok Application Usage on the Emotional Development of Early Childhood at ABA 39 Kindergarten, Malang City

Syahrani Wiedsah Nabilah¹, Tomas Iriyanto², Munaisra Tri Tirtaningsih³

¹Universitas Negeri Malang, Malang, Indonesia

e-mail: *syahrani.wiedsah.2101536@students.um.ac.id,

2tomas.iriyanto.fip@um.ac.id, 3munaisra.tri.fip@um.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of digital technology in the Industrial Revolution 4.0 era has increased smartphone and social media usage, including TikTok, among early childhood. This study aims to analyze the impact of TikTok application usage on the emotional development of early childhood at TK ABA 39 Malang City. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach using observation and in-depth interviews as data collection techniques. The research subjects consisted of three teachers and three parents of children aged 5–6 years. The study was conducted in July 2024 at TK ABA 39 Malang City. The findings indicate that TikTok usage has positive impacts, such as enhancing children's self-expression, creativity, confidence, and the development of empathy and sympathy when children access age-appropriate content under adult supervision. However, negative impacts were also identified, including emotional

instability, decreased focus, and resistant behavior when screen time was restricted. Therefore, it can be concluded that TikTok usage has a significant influence on early childhood emotional development. Active supervision, guidance, and digital literacy education from parents and teachers are essential to ensure that TikTok is used wisely to support healthy and balanced emotional development in early childhood.

Introduction

In the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0), the development of science and technology has progressed rapidly, bringing significant changes to various aspects of human life. One of the technological products that has experienced the most remarkable growth is the smartphone. The presence of smartphones has transformed the way people communicate, learn, work, and access information. Many activities that were previously complex can now be accomplished easily through a single device with just a few touches on the screen. Even tasks that were once considered difficult or impossible can now be carried out through internet networks (Fauzan et al., 2021).

This technological advancement has had a substantial impact on Indonesian society. Survey data indicate that 65.8% of Indonesia's population owns a smartphone (Annur, 2022). This figure suggests that the majority of people obtain information through digital devices. This condition was further intensified during the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to an increase in smartphone usage, including among early

childhood populations. Distance learning, restrictions on social activities, and the need for entertainment prompted parents to provide children with greater access to digital devices. However, excessive smartphone use among young children has raised various concerns, including disruptions in cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development, such as sleep disorders and decreased direct social interaction skills.

Survey results also show that smartphone use begins at a very early age, with 3.5% of children under one year old, 25.9% of children aged 1–4 years, and an increase to 47.7% among children aged 5–6 years (Lidwina, 2020). Children born in this era are often referred to as Generation Alpha, a generation that grows and develops alongside digital technology. They tend to adapt quickly and demonstrate proficiency in operating gadgets, including accessing social media platforms.

Social media refers to online media that enables users to participate, share, and create various forms of content. One of the most popular social media platforms today is TikTok, a short-video-based application launched by ByteDance in 2016. TikTok allows users to express themselves through short videos supported by music, filters, visual effects, and other interactive features (Buana & Maharani, 2022). Its high popularity has positioned TikTok as one of the most downloaded applications worldwide (Kusuma & Oktavianti, 2020).

In addition to serving as an entertainment medium, TikTok has evolved into a platform for communication, social interaction, and digital marketing through features such as live streaming and e-commerce collaborations. However, the platform's high accessibility and strong visual appeal have made it attractive not only to adolescents and adults but also to young children (Adawiyah, 2020). Children tend to imitate behaviors, language, and emotional expressions from the content they watch, often without the ability to distinguish between positive and negative values.

Excessive use of TikTok has the potential to influence children's social-emotional development, including the emergence of inappropriate behavior, reduced respect toward parents, and a tendency to imitate age-inappropriate content. According to Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), children learn through observation and imitation of models in their environment, including those presented in digital media. Therefore, the role of parents is crucial in supervising, guiding, and directing children's use of social media to prevent negative impacts (Framanta, 2020; Syakuro, 2023).

Based on a preliminary study conducted at TK ABA 39 Kota Malang, particularly in Buring Subdistrict, Kedungkandang District, it was found that some children aged 5–6 years actively use TikTok. This is evident from their behaviors, speech patterns, and topics of conversation, which are influenced by the TikTok content they consume

daily. Therefore, this study aims to further examine the *Analysis of the Impact of TikTok Application Usage on the Emotional Development of Early Childhood at TK ABA 39 Kota Malang*, with the objective of identifying both positive and negative impacts and providing recommendations for parents and educators to optimize digital media use during the child's golden age.

Methods

The research employed a qualitative approach. This method aims to describe, portray, and present research phenomena or objects comprehensively in accordance with the factual conditions found in the field (Sugiyono, 2017). The approach used was descriptive analysis, which serves to systematically illustrate and deeply analyze the impacts arising from the use of the TikTok application on the research subjects.

This study was conducted at TK ABA 39 Kota Malang, located in Buring Village, Kedungkandang District, Malang City. The site was selected because it met the criteria relevant to the research focus and theoretical framework. Data were collected through direct interviews with teachers and parents of children at TK ABA 39 Kota Malang, particularly parents of children in Class A2 who were known to use the TikTok application.

Result and Discussions

The Use of the TikTok Application and Its Impact on the Emotional Development of Early Childhood at TK ABA 39 Malang City

Based on interviews with teachers and parents at TK ABA 39 Malang City, the use of the TikTok application shows a significant association with changes in early childhood behavior and emotional expression. Teacher NF revealed that many children at school imitate dance movements, speech styles, and expressions that are trending on TikTok. She stated that “children become more expressive in class, more confident in performing, and are not shy about showing their creativity,” yet on the other hand, some children become “easily offended or quick to anger when joking with peers,” which is suspected to result from imitating exaggerated reactions frequently displayed in social media content. These findings indicate that children do not merely act as passive viewers but also as active imitators of behavioral models observed on TikTok.

This phenomenon is consistent with Social Learning Theory proposed by Bandura (1977), which explains that children learn through observational learning and imitation of models perceived as attractive or engaging. In the context of this study, TikTok content functions as a social model that influences how children express emotions and interact with their surrounding environment. Children who frequently watch entertaining content such as dancing and singing tend to imitate expressions of joy and confidence portrayed in these videos.



Figure 1. Interview documentation at TK ABA 39 Malang City

- (a) Interview with the principal
- (b) Interview with teachers
- (c) and (d) interview with parents

Similar perspectives were expressed by Teacher AL, who highlighted the psychological effects of TikTok usage. She stated that *“the impact of TikTok on children has increased rapidly alongside gadget dependent parenting patterns within families.”* She further explained that the rapid flow of information on the platform may trigger aggressive

behavior and anxiety in students. According to her, “*children often show strong resistance or a tendency to withdraw when screen time is restricted because they lose the comfort derived from their digital environment.*” To address this, she emphasized that schools must serve as a balancer through creative motor activities so that children do not solely depend on the virtual world.

The interview with Teacher ML further supports these findings. She reported that children began to become familiar with TikTok during the COVID-19 pandemic through gadget use at home, with entertainment and dance content being the most frequently consumed. Teacher ML observed emotional changes such as “*irritability and difficulty maintaining focus due to exposure to short-duration videos.*” She noted that when TikTok usage is limited, “*children tend to exhibit sulking behavior as they feel they have lost their instant entertainment.*” Consequently, she emphasized that schools and teachers must collaborate with parents to provide wise digital literacy to address this phenomenon.

From the parents’ perspective, Mama FS stated that her child became more confident and willing to perform after frequently watching and imitating dance and singing videos on TikTok. She explained that her child, who was previously shy, is now more confident both at home and at school. However, she also expressed concern regarding inappropriate content, stating that “*sometimes she follows movements or words that I think are not appropriate for a child of her*

age.” To mitigate this, she consistently accompanies her child and discussed the viewed content to help her understand which behaviors are appropriate to imitate. Her goal is for the child to *“take only the positive sides of TikTok so that her courage can develop without losing her politeness and respect for others.”*

Similar observations were reported by Mama DT and Mama AR. Mama DT noted that while TikTok makes her child more cheerful and expressive, it also presents behavioral challenges. She stated, *“if i forbid DT from playing TikTok, especially during study or meal times, the child usually sulks and gets grumpy.”* To manage this, she emphasizes the importance of parental supervision to ensure content remains age appropriate. Meanwhile, Mama AR believed that TikTok can foster creativity and confidence when used with proper guidance. She observed that AR has become more courageous in performing and even eager to create videos as a form of self-expression. She stated, *“I feel that TikTok can train AR’s creativity and bravery if used correctly.”* Both parents expressed the hope that teachers would provide space for children to develop this confidence through positive and safe school activities.” Children become more confident in singing and dancing in front of others and are even eager to create videos as a form of self-expression. This condition illustrates that behaviors reinforced by attention, praise, or positive emotional responses tend to be repeated, as explained by Bandura (1977), who emphasized that behaviors receiving

positive reinforcement are more likely to persist.

Thus, the emotional development of early childhood at TK ABA 39 Malang City is influenced not only by direct interactions with parents, teachers, and peers, but also by symbolic interactions with models presented on TikTok. TikTok use can serve as a medium for positive emotional expression when adults provide appropriate guidance, explanation, and reinforcement. However, without adequate supervision, children are at risk of imitating emotional expressions and behaviors that are not developmentally appropriate, which may affect their ability to manage emotions and behave adaptively within social environments.

The Use of the TikTok Application and Its Influence on Children's Ability to Express Themselves

The interview results indicate that the TikTok application has become a widely used medium for children to express themselves. Children were observed enjoying activities such as dancing, singing, posing, or role-playing characters they encountered in various videos. This finding suggests that TikTok provides a space for children to explore and display a range of emotional expressions, including happiness, pride, humor, and self-confidence. This phenomenon aligns with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which posits that children learn to express emotions by imitating models they observe and subsequently adapting these behaviors to their surrounding social

contexts.

In this process, children do not merely imitate passively but also receive reinforcement from their environment. When children's expressions through TikTok videos are met with praise from parents, teachers, or peers, they tend to feel valued and are more likely to repeat such behaviors. This positive reinforcement plays a crucial role in strengthening children's self-confidence and encouraging them to express themselves more openly in front of others. Conversely, when children's expressions are met with harsh criticism or ridicule, they may feel embarrassed or hesitant to participate again. Therefore, the way adults respond to children's behavior on TikTok significantly influences the direction of children's development in self-expression.

From Bandura's (1977) perspective, children's ability to express themselves through TikTok results from a sequence of processes, including attention (children's interest in specific content), retention (remembering movements and styles), reproduction (imitating behaviors through body movements and speech), and motivation (being encouraged by reinforcement). When these processes involve positive and age-appropriate content, TikTok can contribute constructively to children's emotional development. However, when the process is dominated by inappropriate or non-educational content, children may develop unhealthy patterns of emotional expression, such as shouting, displaying excessive anger, or exaggerating behaviors to

attract attention.

The Use of TikTok Application on Children's Emotional Development in Terms of Empathy and Sympathy toward Others

In relation to the development of empathy and sympathy, interviews with parents and teachers indicated that some children appeared to more easily understand the feelings of others after being exposed to content portraying helping behaviors, togetherness, and care. Children were observed to imitate gentle speech or prosocial behaviors shown in videos, such as inviting peers to play, comforting friends who were sad, or sharing food. This phenomenon can be explained through Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which posits that children observe the consequences of certain behaviors toward others and learn that caring and helping actions tend to produce positive responses, such as feelings of happiness and emotional closeness.

However, informants also highlighted potential risks when children are more frequently exposed to content that features mockery, demeaning humor, or symbolic violence. In such cases, children may learn that laughing at others, imitating angry expressions, or displaying indifferent attitudes is normal and entertaining. From Bandura's (1977) perspective, when children observe that mocking or indifferent behaviors receive attention and laughter, they may be motivated to imitate these behaviors because they perceive them as socially accepted. As a result, the development of children's empathy and sympathy

toward others may be hindered.

The development of empathy and sympathy in early childhood is therefore strongly influenced by the types of models children observe on TikTok and the reinforcement associated with those behaviors. Parents and teachers play a crucial role in explaining which behaviors are appropriate to imitate and which are not, as well as in providing concrete examples of empathy in daily life. With proper guidance and supervision, TikTok can be utilized as a medium to present positive content that strengthens children's ability to understand and respond sensitively to the emotions of others, in line with the principles of observational learning proposed by Bandura (1977).

The Use of the TikTok Application in Children's Emotional Development Related to Courage and Self-Confidence

A number of parents and teachers have reported that TikTok can encourage children to be more confident in appearing in front of a camera as well as in front of other people. Children who were previously shy become interested in dancing, singing, or storytelling while being recorded, and subsequently share the videos with friends and family members. This phenomenon illustrates that TikTok can serve as a medium for practicing and developing courage and self-confidence, particularly when children receive support and appreciation from their surrounding environment. These findings are consistent with social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), which posits that

children's self-efficacy develops through successful experiences and positive reinforcement from significant others.

However, informants also expressed concerns that children's courage may sometimes develop excessively. For instance, children may become overly attention-seeking, difficult to manage, or more inclined to argue when prohibited from using TikTok. From Bandura's (1977) perspective, this occurs when attention-seeking or rule-defying behaviors receive inconsistent responses—for example, when such behaviors are tolerated because the child appears amusing in videos, but reprimanded when the same behaviors occur in other contexts. This inconsistency in reinforcement can confuse children and contribute to the formation of less adaptive behavioral patterns.

Therefore, the courage and self-confidence that emerge through TikTok use need to be appropriately guided by adults. Children's willingness to perform can be utilized to foster positive communication skills, the courage to ask questions, and active participation in learning activities. Parents and teachers are expected to provide positive reinforcement when children demonstrate courage in appropriate contexts, while also setting clear boundaries when such courage leads to behavior that violates social norms. This approach aligns with Bandura's (1977) view that the development of healthy behavior requires a combination of positive role models, opportunities for practice, and consistent reinforcement.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study and interviews with teachers and parents of students at TK ABA 39 Malang City, it can be concluded that the use of the TikTok application has a significant influence on the emotional development of early childhood. The application provides positive impacts, including improvements in children's ability to express emotions, creativity, confidence in performance, as well as attitudes of empathy and sympathy through the processes of observing and imitating behavioral models presented in TikTok content. Children tend to repeat behaviors that receive reinforcement in the form of attention, praise, and positive responses from their surrounding environment, as explained in Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977). Nevertheless, TikTok use also has the potential to give rise to less appropriate emotional behaviors, such as increased irritability, imitation of negative language or attitudes, and difficulties in emotional regulation, particularly when children are exposed to age-inappropriate content or use the application without adequate supervision. Therefore, the active role of parents and teachers in providing guidance, supervision, and digital literacy education is essential to ensure that the use of TikTok supports children's emotional development in a healthy, balanced manner that is appropriate to their developmental stage.

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