

EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERACTIVE COUNSELING AS AN EFFORT TO REDUCE GADGET USE AMONG STUDENTS OF PGRI BUGIS MIDDLE SCHOOL

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Abstract

The digital era has had a significant impact on people's lifestyles, including school-age children who are increasingly familiar with gadgets such as smartphones and tablets. Excessive gadget use can negatively impact physical health (e.g., sleep disturbances, posture problems), mental health (e.g., anxiety, dependency), and children's social and academic development. On the other hand, gadgets also have positive potential if used wisely, such as supporting learning and communication. Therefore, effective strategies are needed to optimize the benefits of gadgets while reducing their risks. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of interactive counseling in reducing excessive gadget use in school-age children and increasing their awareness of balanced gadget use, especially in the PGRI Bugis Junior High School environment. This study used a quasi-experimental design involving 50 school-age children (13-16 years old) who were divided into an intervention group (n=25) and a control group (n=25). The intervention group received interactive counseling that included material on the dangers of excessive gadget use, strategies for managing gadget use time, and healthy alternative activities. The counseling was conducted using discussion methods, educational games, and demonstrations. Data on children's gadget use duration, knowledge, and attitudes were collected through questionnaires before and after the intervention, then analyzed using statistical tests. Interactive counseling proved effective in reducing excessive gadget use among school-aged children and raising their awareness of the importance of balanced gadget use. This strategy can be part of school education programs to support children's health and development in the digital age. Collaboration between parents, teachers, and health workers is also crucial to strengthen the impact of the counseling and create an environment that supports wise gadget use.

Keywords: Education, Gadgets, Interactive Counseling



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INTRODUCTION

In this modern era, there have been significant changes in people's lives, including among junior high school students, such as those at SMP PGRI Bugis. The use of gadgets such as smartphones and tablets is increasingly common among junior high school students, with widespread internet access allowing them to connect to the digital world almost constantly (Araudha & Darmayanti, 2025). According to data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) in 2022, internet penetration in Indonesia reached 77.02%, with many young users, including junior high school students, actively using gadgets for various purposes (APJII, 2022). SMP PGRI Bugis, as one of the educational institutions in Indonesia, is no exception to this phenomenon. Students at SMP PGRI Bugis exhibit diverse gadget usage patterns, both for learning, social interaction, and entertainment. This gadget use reflects a shift in their lifestyle and interaction with technology (Araudha & Darmayanti, 2024). However, excessive gadget use can have negative impacts on students' physical and mental health and academic achievement. Several recent studies have shown that excessive gadget use in adolescents is associated with the risk of sleep disturbances, decreased concentration in learning, and social interaction problems (Twenge & Campbell, 2018; Cain & Gradisar, 2010; Noviya Andriyani et al., 2020). Wise and balanced gadget use can help adolescents optimize the benefits of technology and reduce negative risks. Strategies such as regulating gadget use time, establishing "gadget-free zones" (e.g., during mealtimes and bedtime), and encouraging physical activity and direct social interaction can reduce and suppress the negative effects of gadget use. Using gadgets before bed can trigger brain activity, making it difficult to rest and reducing children's sleep quality, leading to fatigue, unstable moods, and decreased cognitive abilities (Domoff dkk, 2020; Elhei dkk, 2020; Kim dkk, 2021).

On the other hand, gadgets can also be an effective learning tool if used wisely. Integrating digital technology into education can increase access to learning resources, facilitate collaboration, and support project-based learning (Puentedura, 2006; Tran et al., 2020). Therefore, a balanced approach is needed to optimize the benefits of gadgets while reducing their risks. Interactive counseling is one educational strategy that can be used to raise students' awareness about the balanced use of gadgets. Interactive methods involve active participant participation through discussions, educational games, and activities relevant to students' life contexts. Several studies have shown that interactive approaches are effective in changing behavior and increasing knowledge related to health and technology issues (Hiebert et al., 2015; Baranowski et al., 2003; Safitri, 2024). In the context of reducing excessive gadget use, interactive counseling can increase students' understanding of the positive and negative impacts of gadgets, help students develop time management skills for gadget use, encourage

students to engage in alternative activities that support health and social development, and facilitate discussions between students, teachers, and parents about wise gadget use. SMP PGRI Bugis has a student population that is quite active in using gadgets (Rahmadesti dkk, 2022). This school has the potential to integrate educational programs on balanced gadget use as part of efforts to support student well-being and achievement. By involving students, teachers, and parents, interactive counseling can be one strategy to raise awareness and change behaviors related to gadget use. Education about digital literacy is crucial, where learning about wise gadget use is the foundation for children to understand the limits of gadget and internet use, understand cyberbullying, online privacy, and digital security. Things like this must be taught to children before they become engrossed in the digital world that can lead them astray.

This activity aims to evaluate the effectiveness of interactive counseling in reducing excessive gadget use among students of SMP PGRI Bugis. Specifically, this activity wants to see whether interactive counseling can reduce the duration of gadget use among students of SMP PGRI Bugis (Rahman dkk, 2024). The results of this activity are expected to contribute to the development of effective educational strategies at SMP PGRI Bugis regarding the wise use of gadgets and also support for teachers and parents in guiding students to use gadgets in a balanced manner. Because basically not all impacts resulting from gadget use are negative impacts if the board of teachers as parents in the school environment are able to direct and guide them in the good and beneficial use of gadgets. Gadgets are basically windows to explore the wider world, namely the limitless digital world (Hikmah dkk, 2024). In addition to being a means of communication, gadgets also access various information on the internet such as news, knowledge and connections to social media. The gadget with another advantage, namely portability, allows users, especially students, to access learning and information in the digital world almost anywhere and anytime (Shon dkk, 2021). However, this advantage can also be a disadvantage or something that needs to be watched out for in the use of gadgets because children can become addicted due to using them too often and for too long, supervision by teachers in the school environment and parents at home is also a vital matter in the use of gadgets for school-age children at this time.

RESEARCH METHOD

The method of implementing the Community Service (PKM) activities carried out at SMP PGRI Bugis used a quasi-experimental design method involving 50 school-aged children (6-12 years old) who were divided into an intervention group ($n = 25$) and a control group ($n = 25$) and combined with a PAR (Participatory Action Research) approach involving the community where in this study were all residents of SMP PGRI Bugis. This method was chosen because the results are more relevant to the real context because it is carried out in a natural setting and this method is more practical and feasible to be carried out in real situations where randomization is difficult or unethical (Widyaningrum dkk, 2023). This activity emphasizes the active involvement and participation of all parties involved, namely the PKM implementation team, teachers, and students of SMP PGRI Bugis, in every stage of the activity. The implementation of this activity is on August 12, 2025, but on the previous date we have started the initial stage where in the initial stage the PKM implementation team conducted initial observations and intensive discussions with the school (Principal, Vice Principal of Student Affairs, and teacher representatives) to identify specific needs related to Interactive counseling as an Effort to Reduce Excessive Gadget Use in School-Age Children (salsabila & Nasution, 2023). Quantitative data was collected through interviews and simple surveys with teachers and students to obtain data directly from the source regarding excessive gadget use for school-age children. The results of this stage are used to compile counseling materials that are relevant, interactive, and appropriate to the characteristics of SMP PGRI Bugis students.

The next stage, the action or implementation stage, is the implementation of the plan that has been prepared. This activity takes the form of interactive counseling conducted in the schoolyard. The counseling material includes material on the dangers of excessive gadget use and strategies for managing gadget use time (Faiza dkk, 2024). The counseling is carried out using discussion methods, educational games, and demonstrations. Data on the duration of gadget use, children's knowledge, and attitudes are collected through questionnaires before and after the intervention, then analyzed using statistical tests. At the end of the counseling session, a program evaluation is conducted by asking each student to write a survey provided by the PKM organizer as feedback used to measure and understand research data that becomes the basis for compiling journals and further interventions that can be implemented independently by the school (Lu dkk, 2024; Montag dkk, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An interactive outreach activity conducted at SMP PGRI Bugis in Anjatan District, Indramayu Regency, by PKM (Student Creativity Program) students from STAI Darussalam Kunir represents a concrete implementation of students' role in addressing social challenges arising from the development of digital technology, particularly regarding the excessive use of gadgets by school-age children (Astari dkk, 2022). This phenomenon impacts not only academic aspects but also children's social, emotional, and physical development. Therefore, the approach used in this activity was Participatory Action Research (PAR), which involved the entire community. This study included all members of SMP PGRI Bugis. It was designed comprehensively and participatory to address various dimensions of student behavior.

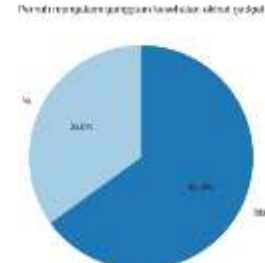
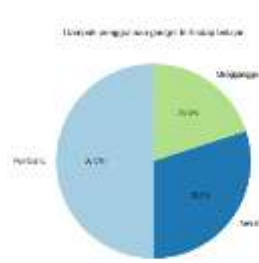
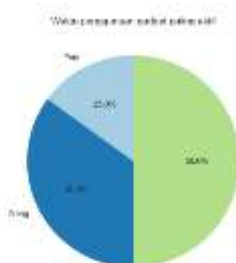
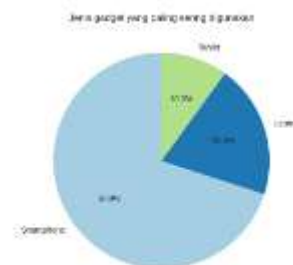
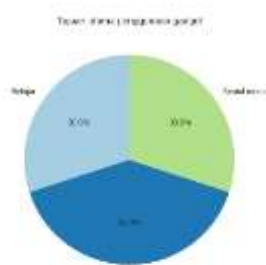
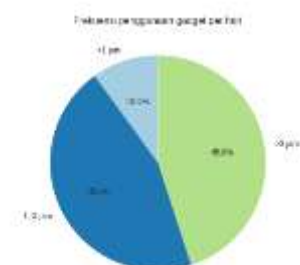
Based on initial observations and interviews with school officials, it was found that most students use gadgets for more than 5-7 hours per day outside of school hours. These activities are dominated by playing online games, watching videos on digital platforms, and using social media (Hidayat dkk, 2023). The impacts felt by teachers include decreased concentration, reduced participation in class activities, and increased cases of tardiness and physical fatigue. According to interviews with teachers who supervise students at the school, factors contributing to excessive gadget use include a lack of parental supervision at home, a lack of engaging alternative activities for students, students' ignorance of the negative impacts of gadget use, and a social environment that encourages uncontrolled digital trends (Orzikulova dkk, 2024).

These issues served as the basis for the Community Service Program (PKM) team to design outreach activities that were not only informative but also capable of fostering awareness and commitment to behavioral change both inside and outside the school environment (Chafid dkk, 2023). The outreach activities were conducted using an interactive approach that engaged students as active participants. This strategy was chosen because school-age children tend to be more responsive to fun and communicative methods. Some of the activities used included; (1) visual and Audio Presentation: The material was delivered through engaging slides, short videos, and infographics that illustrated the impacts of excessive gadget use; (2) group Discussion: Students were divided into small groups to discuss their personal experiences, share stories, and develop solutions together; (3) educational Games: Games such as interactive quizzes and group challenges were used to reinforce student understanding in a fun way; (4) written Commitment and Survey: At the end of the session, students wrote down their personal commitment to managing gadget time and choosing healthier alternative activities (Akgül-Gündoğdu, 2022).

This approach has proven effective in building student emotional engagement, improving retention of the material, and encouraging personal reflection. Teacher Response: Teachers reported that students became more active in class discussions and showed interest in non-digital activities after the counseling (Chen dkk, 2021).

Table 1. Gadget Usage Survey Results Table (50 Students)

No.	Category	Answer Choices	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
1	Frequency of use per day	<1 hour	5	10%
		1–3 hours	22	45%
		>3 hours	23	45%
2	The main purpose of using gadgets	Learning	15	30%
		Entertainment	20	40%
		Social media	15	30%
3	The most frequently used types of gadgets	Smartphone	35	70%
		Laptop	10	20%
		Tablet	5	10%
4	Most active usage time	Morning	8	15%
		Afternoon	17	35%
		Evening	25	50%
5	Impact on the learning process	Helpful	25	50%
		Neutral	15	30%
		Annoying	10	20%
6	Health problems caused by gadgets	Yes	18	35%
		No.	32	65%



This impact shows that interactive counseling not only provides information, but is also able to encourage gradual behavioral changes.



Figure 1. Presentation of Material



Figure 1. Activity



Figure 1. Documentation

CONCLUSION

The Gadget Phenomenon Among Students: The use of gadgets such as smartphones and tablets has become an integral part of the lives of junior high school students. While they have positive potential for learning, excessive use negatively impacts physical and mental health, and academic achievement.

Identified Negative Impacts: Students who use gadgets for more than 5–7 hours per day exhibit symptoms such as sleep disturbances, decreased concentration, fatigue, and reduced participation in class. Contributing factors include lack of parental supervision, a lack of alternative activities, and low digital literacy.

Interactive Counseling as a Solution: The Student Creativity Program (PKM) activity conducted by students at STAI Darussalam Kunir used a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach and quasi-experimental methods. Interactive counseling has proven effective in raising student awareness, building personal commitment, and encouraging behavioral change.

Educational Strategies Used: Visual presentations, group discussions, educational games, and written commitments. This approach successfully built student emotional engagement and increased interest in non-digital activities.

Recommendations: Digital literacy should be an integral part of school education. Collaboration between teachers, parents, and students is very important to guide the use of gadgets wisely and in a balanced manner.

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