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### **The Relationship Between Excessive Screen Time and Children's Frustration Tolerance During Learning: Addressing the Link Between Habitual Instant Gratification and the Tendency to Give Up or Cry**

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#### **Abstract**

Excessive screen time in early childhood has become a crucial issue impacting socio-emotional development, particularly frustration tolerance. Children accustomed to the instant gratification provided by digital devices tend to face difficulties when dealing with learning challenges that require a process. This study aims to analyze the relationship between the duration of screen time and the ability of children aged 6–7 years to manage emotions and frustration during private tutoring sessions. The research method employed is descriptive qualitative, with data collection techniques consisting of observation, direct participatory observation, and field notes compiled over four months of private sessions (Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays from 09:00 to 10:00 WIB). The results of the analysis indicate that screen time exceeding the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended limits is closely correlated with increased defensive behavior, decreased concentration, and self-defense mechanisms—such as crying or throwing negative accusations at the tutor—when encountering difficulties in literacy and numeracy (calistung). It is concluded that parental supervision of screen duration and the implementation of emotion regulation by private tutors are key factors in moderating the negative impacts of screen time on children's learning readiness.

**Keywords:** Screen Time, Frustration Tolerance, Early Childhood (6-7 Years Old), Instant Gratification, Private Class.

#### **Abstrak**

*Paparan gawai (screen time) berlebihan pada anak usia dini telah menjadi isu krusial yang berdampak pada aspek sosial-emosional, khususnya toleransi frustrasi. Anak yang terbiasa dengan kepuasan instan dari perangkat digital cenderung memiliki kesulitan dalam menghadapi tantangan belajar yang membutuhkan proses. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis hubungan antara durasi paparan gawai dengan kemampuan anak usia 6-7 tahun dalam mengelola emosi dan rasa frustrasi saat sesi belajar privat berlangsung. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif deskriptif dengan Teknik pengumpulan data berupa pengamatan, observasi langsung secara partisipatif, dan catatan lapangan (field notes) selama 4 bulan sesi privat (Senin, Selasa, Rabu pukul 09.00-10.00 WIB). Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa paparan gawai (screen time) yang melibihi batas rekomendasi World Health Organization (WHO) berkaitan erat dengan peningkatan perilaku defensif, penurunan konsentrasi, dan mekanisme pertahanan diri berupa tangisan atau tuduhan negatif kepada pengajar ketika menghadapi kesulitan calistung. Disimpulkan bahwa pengawasan durasi oleh orang tua dan penerapan regulasi emosi oleh guru privat merupakan faktor kunci dalam memoderasi dampak negatif gawai terhadap kesiapan belajar anak.*

*Kata Kunci:* Screen Time, Toleransi Frustrasi, Anak Usia Dini 6-7 Tahun, Kepuasan Instan, Kelas Privat.

## Introduction

The rapid development of information and communication technology in recent decades has seamlessly integrated gadgets, especially smartphones, into daily life, even for toddlers and preschoolers. Early exposure to gadgets is becoming increasingly prevalent, sparking significant debates within the realms of pediatric health and child development, particularly concerning its social and emotional impacts. This is reinforced by the consensus that the escalation of gadget and smartphone usage among young children over the last decade has substantially influenced their socio-emotional development (Lutfitasari et al., 2026). Consequently, understanding the impact of technology from an early age is a crucial imperative for educators and parents alike (Wulandari & Fauziah, 2024).

The necessity of limiting screen time has been emphasized by Global Health Standards. According to World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations, screen time for infants should be entirely avoided, whereas, for children aged 2-4 years, the maximum recommended duration is no more than one hour per day. The "less is better" principle serves as the foundation of global guidelines for maintaining optimal early childhood growth and development (Manfaatn & Aulia, 2024). In reality, however, actual screen durations frequently exceed these recommended limits, a trend that can precipitate psychosocial developmental issues in preschool-aged children (Ferdika Bintang, 2025; Ramadhani, 2024).

Children's habituation to the instant gratification provided by gadgets adversely affects their emotion regulation capabilities. Emotions are defined as feelings that significantly impact behavior, serving as reactions to both internal and external stimuli. When children are continuously exposed to gadgets without adequate supervision, they face considerable hurdles in recognizing and managing their emotions (Aini, 2025). Research by Ramadhani (2024) confirms that excessive digital screen exposure is a dominant factor triggering high risks of emotional delays in children, rendering it exceedingly difficult for them to suppress emotional outbursts when confronting real-world situations that contradict their immediate desires.

Low frustration tolerance during learning is a tangible consequence of gadget addiction. An emotional crisis is understood as an individual's internal reaction to external stressors, encompassing a temporary loss of problem-solving abilities. Children habituated to rapid stimuli from smartphones are prone to emotional crises when faced with academic tasks demanding a prolonged, sustained process. Indicators of emotional crises in early childhood vary, ranging from behavioral shifts and mood instability to a tendency to withdraw or cry when facing difficulties. "An emotional crisis is understood as an internal reaction to an external threat that involves a temporary loss of the ability to cope with problems" (Dini, 2025).

The phenomenon of a child suddenly crying or accusing a teacher of being "strict" (*galak*) when asked to repeat a reading or writing exercise constitutes a defense mechanism against learning-induced pressure. According to Elizabeth B. Hurlock, the initial symptom of emotional behavior is general arousal; however, as children mature, these reactions should ideally moderate as they learn how others respond to their emotional outbursts. Nuraini et al. (2025) elucidate that when children encounter severe impediments in their socio-emotional developmental process, they tend to unleash emotional expressions negatively or regressively as a coping mechanism for life's crises or obstacles. This dynamic explains why affected children surrender easily when confronting academic challenges that demand a higher degree of cognitive effort compared to digital activities.

To address this issue, the optimal involvement of teachers and parents as behavioral role models is essential. Teachers play a pivotal role in the emotional development of the children under their care, acting as models both during and outside of instructional time (Saptandari et al., 2022). Evidence suggests that positive teacher emotions facilitate flexibility. Dini (2025) adds that through the application of appropriate intervention strategies—such as empathetic listening and the creation of a secure environment—children can recover from emotional crises and re-engage in the learning process with renewed enthusiasm.

## Method

This study utilized a qualitative approach employing an Analytical Descriptive method. The primary focus of the research was to observe the socio-emotional behavior of a 6-7-year-old child enrolled in a private tutoring program. Research data were collected in real-time and directly in the field by the researcher over a four-month period, following a routine schedule of three times a week (Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays from 09:00 to 10:00 WIB) at the child's residence.

The primary data collection instruments included:

1. Participatory Observation: The researcher was directly involved as both the private tutor and observer to assess emotional responses, work endurance, attention span, and behavioral shifts when the child was presented with literacy and numeracy (*calistung*) materials requiring cognitive persistence and patience.
2. Field Notes: The researcher compiled handwritten anecdotal records immediately following each private session to meticulously document the actions, verbalizations, crying episodes, and defense mechanisms exhibited by the child.
3. Integrated Data Analysis: The observational data and field notes spanning four months were periodically recapitulated, subsequently analyzed, and cross-validated using relevant reference data and literature published between 2022 and 2026.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

The following recapitulation table presents observational data tracking the socio-emotional stability of the 6-7-year-old private student from the first to the fourth month:

Table of Participatory Observation Results (4-Month Compilation)

Month	Week	Frequency of Emotional Crises (Per Week)	Average Child's Focus Duration (Minutes)	Defensive Behavior / Emergent Defense Mechanisms	Notes & Learning Progress
Month 1	1	3 times	5 – 10 minutes	Looks at the worksheet, asks questions, and still follows the teacher's instructions.	The child shows curiosity about what will be learned.
	2	3 times	5 – 15 minutes	Refuses to speak, rests their head on the desk, and cries without making a sound.	The child feels incapable or is demanding immediate gratification from parents that is not instantly granted (mood swings).
	3	3 times	5 – 10 minutes	Pouts, complains of being tired and exhausted to avoid tasks perceived as difficult.	Motivation and scaffolding/assistance are introduced.

	4	2 times	3 – 10 minutes	Interrupts the teacher's explanation, saying, "Oh yeah, I already know that."	The child claims to know what to do out of a desire to finish the task instantly.
<b>Month 2</b>	5	1 time	5 – 15 minutes	Holds a smartphone while playing a game, asks the teacher to wait.	The teacher allows a 5-minute window to finish the game, as the child becomes highly sensitive if reprimanded immediately.
	6	2 times	5 – 15 minutes	Refuses to study reading syllables while crying silently.	Introduction of concrete learning media (letter and number cards).
	7	2 times	5 – 15 minutes	Asks for permission to make a drink and go to the bathroom.	Delay tactics; the teacher continues to provide time and motivation.
	8	1 time	5 – 10 minutes	Stomps feet in frustration when refusing an addition task out of a feeling of incompetence, stating, "Miss Deiby is strict/mean."	Avoidance strategy.
<b>Month 3</b>	9	2 times	2 – 5 minutes	Complains verbally but still completes the addition worksheet.	The smartphone was confiscated by parents prior to the study session.
	10	1 time	5 – 10 minutes	Slouches back in the chair after making an error in an addition calculation.	The frequency of crying decreases, shifting to brief physical expressions of frustration.
	11	1 time	5 – 15 minutes	Wants to rush through reading a book.	No crying observed.
	12	1 time	10 – 20 minutes	Able to control frustration by taking a deep breath and pouting.	The child begins to accept that the learning process cannot be rushed.
<b>Month 4</b>	13	1 time	10 – 15 minutes	Sighs heavily after writing a letter incorrectly during dictation.	Emotion regulation skills begin to visibly emerge.
	14	0 times	10 – 30 minutes	Shows a calm and enthusiastic expression upon successfully	No defensive behaviors detected.

				completing reading and writing tasks.	
	15	0 times	20 minutes	Slightly restless, eager to finish quickly because they were promised a treat at the store upon completion.	Long-term attention span begins to manifest.
	16	0 times	30 minutes	Minor instances of dry crying (rubbing eyes without tears) out of fatigue and a desire to finish quickly.	Still requires motivation and cause-and-effect reasoning. The child successfully completes assigned tasks.

### Analysis of Field Notes and Integration of References

Based on the compilation in the observation table above, the researcher conducted an in-depth analysis correlating the field findings of the 6-7-year-old student with supporting theoretical literature:

#### A. Analysis of the Phenomenon of Giving Up Easily and Crying (Month 1)

A direct excerpt from the researcher's field notes on a Monday in the third week depicts the child's emotional crisis: *"At minute 15, when asked to complete the worksheet, the child suddenly said, 'Abh.. that's too much' while frowning. When the researcher tried to calm them down, the child immediately buried their face in the desk and refused to study, but when their father called from upstairs several times, the child was willing to start again."*

This condition serves as tangible field evidence of the phenomenon of low frustration tolerance. The child experiences severe impediments in recognizing and managing their emotions as a direct result of habituation to the instant gratification patterns provided by gadgets (Aini, 2025). The inherent characteristic of gadgets—providing rapid visual feedback and dopamine hits—trains the child's brain to reject any activity that is slow-paced and requires sustained effort (Manfaatin & Aulia, 2024). When confronted with reading or writing tasks necessitating perseverance, the child undergoes an emotional crisis and resorts to crying as an escapist mechanism (Dini, 2025).

#### B. Defensive Behavior and Negative Accusations Toward the Teacher (Month 2)

A direct excerpt from the field notes on a Tuesday in the sixth week captures the dynamics of the child's interactions: *"...refusing to read syllables, the child immediately stomped their feet on the floor and muttered softly, 'Miss Deiby is mean, always getting angry!'. The child immediately lowered their head while crying without shedding tears and looked away when the researcher provided a re-explanation."*

This behavior indicates that the child is employing a regressive defense mechanism by externalizing blame onto their environment (the private tutor). Aligning with Elizabeth B. Hurlock's theoretical foundation, obstacles in socio-emotional development compel children to express their emotions negatively when facing crises or life hurdles (Nuraini et al., 2025). This defensive posture is further exacerbated if parental social control at home is exceptionally weak, leading the child to assume they can instantly force their will in the real world just as they operate a smartphone (Ferdika Bintang, 2025).

#### C. Development of Emotion Regulation and Duration of Focus (Months 3 and 4)

A direct excerpt from the field notes on a Wednesday in the fourteenth week illustrates the success of the applied interventions: *"The child was asked to do a short sentence dictation (imla). When they made a mistake*

*writing a double consonant, the child let out a long sigh. However, the child did not cry or get upset; they took the eraser independently, corrected their writing, then looked at the researcher with a smile and said, 'Done, Miss!.'*"

The success of this behavioral transition was significantly influenced by two primary factors. First, the private tutor consistently acted as a positive emotional role model—refraining from retaliating against the child's frustration, actively listening to complaints with empathy, and breaking down academic tasks into smaller segments (chunking) so the child could experience a gradual sense of achievement (Dini, 2025; Saptandari et al., 2022).

Second, the parents instituted a transition to restrict screen time at home, aligning it with pediatric health recommendations (Lutfitasari et al., 2026; Wulandari & Fauziah, 2024). This reduction in digital stimulation demonstrably improved the child's mood stability and extended their attention span, progressing from a baseline of merely 5 minutes to a full 30 minutes without significant emotional disruption (Ramadhani, 2024).

## Conclusion

Based on the observations, direct participatory monitoring, and analysis of field notes gathered over four months of private tutoring sessions with a 6-7-year-old child, it is concluded that there is a highly significant causal relationship between excessive screen time and a child's low frustration tolerance during learning. Children habituated to the instant gratification of digital devices demonstrably experience deficits in emotion regulation, which manifest as behaviors such as giving up easily, crying, and deploying negative defense mechanisms—such as accusing the tutor of being "strict"—when confronting difficulties in basic literacy and numeracy.

The implications of this study underscore that addressing a child's emotional crisis requires an absolute, bidirectional synergy. Parents at home must enforce strict social control by limiting screen time to safeguard the child's mental and emotional stability (Ferdika Bintang, 2025; Ramadhani, 2024), thereby ensuring their readiness for private tutoring. Simultaneously, field educators and private tutors must be adept at applying empathy-based intervention strategies and utilizing adaptive learning media to restore the child's mental resilience. This combined approach ensures the child attains the socio-emotional maturity necessary to successfully transition into elementary school.

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