

Selective Mutism in Elementary School Children: Do Gadgets Play a Role?

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Abstract:

This study analyzes the phenomenon of selective mutism in elementary school children and the role of gadget use in influencing the condition. Selective mutism is an anxiety disorder characterized by the inability of children to speak in certain environments, such as school, although they can communicate fluently in more familiar environments. Excessive use of gadgets is known to worsen selective mutism because it reduces direct social interaction, increases levels of social anxiety, and interferes with children's concentration. The purpose of this study was to identify the causes of selective mutism and evaluate the impact of gadget use on the disorder. Using a qualitative approach through interviews and observations of students at SDN Kaliwates 01 Jember, this study explored the factors that influence selective mutism, especially in relation to the impact of gadgets on increasing anxiety and limited communication in children. The results showed a relationship between gadget use and increased symptoms of selective mutism. Support from parents and schools was found to have a crucial role in regulating gadget use and improving children's social skills. This study recommends limiting gadget use and children's participation in social activities as an effort to help them gradually overcome selective mutism and build confidence in communicating in a wider social environment.

Keywords: *Selective Mutism, Influence of Gadgets, Student Development*

Introduction

The rapid development of technology has affected various aspects of life, including parenting patterns.¹ The use of technology is no longer limited to adults, but now also reaches toddlers to teenagers. This condition has become increasingly apparent since the COVID-19 pandemic, when technology has become an inseparable element of everyday life. However, excessive use of technology, especially in children, can have negative impacts if not properly controlled. These impacts include disruption of children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. Therefore, parental

¹ Sa'ira Ila Mafaz, "Dampak Globalisasi Terhadap Pola Asuh Orang Tua Mengenai Emosional Anak Usia Dini (4-8 Tahun) Dalam Penggunaan Gadget Di Jl. Blambangan 1, Tambak Sawah, Waru, Sidoarjo," *Abdi Masyarakat*, 2022, <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:256801003>

Selective Mutism in Elementary School Children: Do Gadgets Play a Role?

supervision is needed as an important factor in ensuring that technology is used wisely to support children's growth and development.²

Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection mandates that every child has the right to grow and develop optimally.³ This right can only be realized if there is an active role from parents in guiding and supervising children, especially in the use of technology.⁴ According to Santrock and Yussen, child development involves changes that occur from conception and continue throughout the life cycle. This development includes various aspects, such as physical, cognitive, language, social, emotional, moral, creative, spiritual, and sensory development.⁵

Child development is influenced by various factors, both external and internal.⁶ Internal factors are things inherent in a child that influence their development. Genetics, for example, play a major role in determining intellectual potential, physical abilities, temperament, and susceptibility to disease.⁷ In addition, physical and mental health are important foundations for children's development. Healthy children tend to be more active in learning and interacting. Self-motivation is also a very important internal factor, where children who are curious and enthusiastic about learning usually achieve better development. The ability to adapt to new situations and face challenges also helps children develop emotionally and socially. Finally, personality and temperament, such as introverted or extroverted, patient or easily angered, also influence how children respond to their environment and how they learn and interact.

External factors include things from outside the child that affect their growth. One of them is the use of gadgets and technology, which can have a positive impact if used wisely, such as as a learning medium. However, excessive use of gadgets can inhibit social interaction, reduce physical activity, and affect children's emotional development.⁸ In addition, a harmonious family environ-

² Agustiarini Eka Dheasari dan Lathifatul Fajriyah, "Tantangan Orang Tua Dalam Mendidik Anak Di Era Digital," *Al-ATHFAL: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak*, 2022, <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:251728898.tan>

³ Rinaldus Tanduklangi, 'Pengaruh Undang – Undang Nomor 23 Tahun 2002 Tentang Perlindungan Anak Terhadap Cara Guru Menegakkan Kedisiplinan Di Sdn 256 Inpres Sangpolo', *Edukatif: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 2023., <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:259574480>.

⁴ Ririn Nurlafika Dewi Ririn, 'Hubungan Orang Tua Dan Guru Dalam Mencegah Bullying', *Annwaliyah: Jurnal Pendidikan Guru Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* 6, no. 2 (2023): 110–16, <https://doi.org/10.58518/awwaliyah.v6i2.1739>.

⁵ Dwi Wulandari and Triana Lestari, 'Pengaruh Gadget Terhadap Perkembangan Emosi Anak', *Jurnal Pendidikan Tambusai* 5, no. 1 (2021): 1689–95.

⁶ Terra Aurelia, Nan Rahminawati, and Dinar Nur Inten, 'Analisis Faktor Internal Dan Faktor Eksternal Yang Mempengaruhi Keterlambatan Bicara (Speech Delay) Anak Usia 5,9 Tahun', *Bandung Conference Series: Early Childhood Teacher Education* 1, no. 1 (2022): 69–78, <https://doi.org/10.29313/bcsecte.v2i2.3504>.

⁷ Fredericksen Victoranto Amseke et al., 'Pengaruh Kelekatan Orang Tua Dan Kecakapan Emosi Terhadap Kemandirian Anak Usia Dini', *Jurnal Riset Golden Age PAUD UHO* 7, no. 1 (2024).

⁸ Fadlan Masykura Setiadi, Sri Maryati, and Angge Spto Mubharokkh, 'Analisis Dampak Penggunaan Gadget Terhadap Perkembangan Psikologis Dan Keagamaan Anak Usia Dini (TK Dan SD) Dalam Perspektif Pendidikan Agama Islam', *Muaddib: Islamic Education Journal* 7, no. 1 (2024): 1–11.

ment, good parenting, and emotional warmth from parents also play an important role in supporting children's development.⁹ Formal and informal education also provide opportunities for children to develop cognitive, social, and emotional skills.¹⁰ Meanwhile, exposure to social media and digital content can affect children's mindset and behavior, both positively and negatively, depending on the type of content they consume.¹¹ Social and cultural environmental factors, such as interactions with peers and cultural values, also shape children's character and personality.¹²

One of the effects of student development, namely the negative impact of uncontrolled gadget use, is the emergence of communication disorders, such as selective mutism. Selective mutism is an anxiety disorder that makes children reluctant to speak in certain situations, even though they are actually able to speak fluently in other conditions. This disorder can hinder the process of children's communication development which, according to behaviorist theory, is highly dependent on stimulation from the environment. If children do not get the right stimulation, their communication skills will not develop optimally.¹³ Good communication skills affect the development of students both in terms of social and cognitive abilities¹⁴

Fanisa Qorina Zahroh's research entitled "Identification of Symptoms and Impact of Selective Mutism in Students of SMP Muhammadiyah 1 Jakarta in Learning Drama Texts" found that selective mutism hinders students' communication, thus affecting their learning process and knowledge development. The results of this study indicate that selective mutism is not a problem that can be taken lightly. On the contrary, this disorder requires serious attention from parents, educators, and the school environment because it has a significant impact on children's development.¹⁵

The article written by Chaya Rodrigues Pereira and colleagues discusses the various diagnostic tools available to evaluate and diagnose the main symptoms of selective mutism (SM). Selective mutism is an anxiety disorder characterized by the inability of children to speak in certain social situations, although they are able to speak fluently in more familiar environments. This disorder

⁹ Herviana Muarifah Ngewa, 'Peran Orang Tua Dalam Pengasuhan Anak', *Educhild: Journal of Early Childhood Education* 1, no. 1 (2019): 96–115.

¹⁰ Ageng Saepudin Kanda S Salsabila Nuril Jaoza, 'Pentingnya Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini Bagi Tumbuh Kembang Anak', *GLORY (Global Leadership Organizational Research in Management)* 2, no. 2 (2024): 9.

¹¹ F. A Mauryn, 'Dampak Teknologi Digital Terhadap Konsentrasi Belajar Dan Perkembangan Kognitif Adak Sd Dalam Perspektif Psikologi Perkembangan', *Cendekia Pendidikan* 4, no. 8 (2024): 48–58.da

¹² Muhammad Hizbullah and Haidir, 'Peran Sekolah Dalam Pembentukan Akhlak Siswa Di Smp Cerdas Murni Tembung', *Membangun Kearifan Lokal Melalui Inovasi Menuju Masa Depan Kreatif*, 2021, 213–20.

¹³ Marlan, 'Penyebab Selektif Mutisme' (universitas muhamaddiyah purwokerto, 2018).

¹⁴ Musrifah, 'Komunikasi Efektif Pada Anak Usia Dini', *Annalayah: Jurnal PGMI* 4 (2021).

¹⁵ Fanisa Qorina Zahro, 'Identifikasi Gejala Dan Dampak Mutisme Selektif Pada Siswa Smp Muhammadiyah 1 Jakarta Dalam Pembelajaran Teks Drama Fanisa', *BAHTERA INDONESIA: Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia IDENTIFIKASI* 9, no. 2 (2024): 467–77, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31943/bi.v9i2.628>.

Selective Mutism in Elementary School Children: Do Gadgets Play a Role?

has a significant impact on children's psychosocial functioning and academic achievement. Based on the results of a systematic literature search, most studies were found to still use non-standardized diagnostic tools. However, some tools such as the Selective Mutism Questionnaire (SMQ), the Anxiety Disorders Interview Schedule (ADIS), and the School Speech Questionnaire (SSQ) are the most frequently used instruments. In addition, new diagnostic instruments, such as the Frankfurt Scale of SM (FSSM), show great potential for use in clinical assessments in the future.¹⁶

Research conducted by Peter Muris and Thomas H. Ollendick shows a strong link between selective mutism and social anxiety. Most children with selective mutism also meet the criteria for other anxiety disorders, especially Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD). The process of diagnosing selective mutism requires special attention to the fears experienced by the child, such as fear of negative evaluation from others. In clinical management, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)-based therapy has been identified as the most effective intervention. CBT includes various components, including education about anxiety, relaxation exercises, behavioral training through modeling techniques and gradual exposure, and active parental involvement in supporting the course of therapy. In addition, selective mutism is often accompanied by other conditions, such as language disorders or autism spectrum disorders, which complicate the diagnosis and require a multidisciplinary approach. This includes an in-depth assessment of language abilities and early identification of signs of autism. Thus, the management of selective mutism requires a holistic approach, not only focusing on anxiety but also considering the presence of accompanying comorbidities.¹⁷

Selective mutism is often accompanied by a variety of other symptoms. Research conducted by Christopher A. Kearney and Melanie Rede revealed that children with selective mutism can show symptoms such as anxiety, oppositional behavior, communication disorders, and other developmental problems. Several clinical profiles have been identified, including groups of children with predominantly anxiety, communication delays, or a combination of the two. Selective mutism also has significant differences from social anxiety disorder, as it involves additional characteristics, such as behavioral inhibition and academic difficulties. In addition, many children with selective mutism have comorbidities, such as autism spectrum disorder, language delay, or intellectual disability. Assessment of this disorder requires a comprehensive approach, which includes direct observation, interviews with parents and teachers, and formal testing of language skills, social anxiety,

¹⁶ Chaya Rodrigues Pereira et al., 'Diagnosing Selective Mutism: A Critical Review of Measures for Clinical Practice and Research', *European Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 32, no. 10 (2023): 1821–39, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-021-01907-2>.

¹⁷ Peter Muris and Thomas H. Ollendick, 'Current Challenges in the Diagnosis and Management of Selective Mutism in Children', *Psychology Research and Behavior Management* 14 (2021): 159–67, <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S274538>.

and intellectual functioning. Collaboration between clinical professionals and school officials is crucial to ensure accurate diagnosis. In treatment, a multimodal approach, including exposure therapy, social skills training, family therapy, and pharmacotherapy, has been shown to be effective. In addition, intensive group-based interventions have shown promising results in reducing social anxiety and improving communication skills in children with selective mutism.¹⁸

Schools have a crucial role to play in the management of selective mutism, as described in research by Joe White and Caroline Bond. They identified three key aspects of supporting students with selective mutism. First, schools need to improve teachers' and staff's understanding of selective mutism to avoid misconceptions, such as the view that mutism is caused by trauma or is a form of manipulative behavior. Second, multiprofessional collaboration, involving teachers, school psychologists, and parents, is essential in designing effective interventions that are based on the individual needs of students. Third, schools can provide direct interventions through systematic behavioral approaches, such as graded exposure or positive reinforcement, which have been shown to be effective in improving students' communication skills. In addition, adaptations to the learning environment, such as providing a safe space in the classroom or using visual aids, can also help reduce social pressure and create an atmosphere that supports the development of students with selective mutism.¹⁹

Based on the results of observations conducted at SDN Kaliwates 01, students with selective mutism showed difficulties in interacting with teachers and peers. This obstacle has a negative impact on the smoothness of the learning process and hinders the development of students' overall abilities. To overcome this problem, a comprehensive understanding of selective mutism is needed, including an in-depth analysis of the factors that cause it. In addition, the implementation of effective preventive measures is important to minimize the risk of the emergence of this condition, so that students can optimize their communication and learning abilities. Given the urgency of this problem, more intensive supervision from parents is needed on the use of technology by children. In addition, a holistic approach is needed to prevent developmental disorders, such as selective mutism, so that children can grow and develop optimally according to their rights.

¹⁸ Christopher A. Kearney and Melanie Rede, 'The Heterogeneity of Selective Mutism: A Primer for a More Refined Approach', *Frontiers in Psychology* 12, no. June (2021): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.700745>.

¹⁹ Joe White and Caroline Bond, 'The Role That Schools Hold in Supporting Young People with Selective Mutism: A Systematic Literature Review', *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs* 22, no. 3 (2022): 232–42, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12561>.

Selective Mutism in Elementary School Children: Do Gadgets Play a Role?

Mutism disorder is an anxiety disorder characterized by an individual's inability to speak in certain social situations, despite being able to speak fluently in other situations, such as at home²⁰ Selective mutism often appears in childhood and can continue into adulthood if not treated appropriately²¹

Selective mutism is an anxiety disorder characterized by the inability of a person, especially children, to speak in certain social situations even though they are able to speak fluently in a comfortable environment, such as at home. This condition usually appears at an early age and is often detected when children start school, where they are expected to interact with peers and teachers.²²

Methods

The method used in this study is a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of selective mutism in children influenced by gadget use. This approach was chosen because it is able to comprehensively explore the subjective experiences and interactions of children in social, cultural, and educational contexts. This research method uses a qualitative method, with a case study approach. Data collection techniques used include interviews and observations. Interviews were conducted with related parties, such as teachers and parents, to explore their views and experiences about gadget use and its impact on children's communication skills. Observations were conducted to directly observe student behavior in the school environment, especially in situations that can trigger symptoms of selective mutism. This study focuses on students of SDN Kaliwates 01 Jember as the object of study.

The research included two first-grade students. The school was chosen because the researcher noticed that at SDN Kaliwates 1, one student exhibited signs of selective mutism, such as struggling to speak in specific settings, despite being able to communicate normally at home. This observation is significant for the study. Although this study aims to describe the phenomenon in depth, the results are expected to be the basis for further research and provide practical contributions for teachers and parents in dealing with selective mutism due to gadget use.

²⁰ Louise Cummings, *Handbook of Pragmatic Language Disorders: Complex and Underserved Populations*, *Handbook of Pragmatic Language Disorders: Complex and Underserved Populations*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-74985-9>.

²¹ Miina Koskela et al., 'Long-Term Outcomes of Selective Mutism: A Systematic Literature Review', *BMC Psychiatry* 23, no. 1 (2023): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-023-05279-6>.

²² Rodrigues Pereira et al., 'Diagnosing Selective Mutism: A Critical Review of Measures for Clinical Practice and Research'.

Results and Discussion

Selective mutism is an anxiety disorder that is usually experienced by children, characterized by the inability of children to speak in certain environments, such as at school, even though they can speak fluently in other places, such as at home or with people close to them. Children with selective mutism often appear "silent" or "unwilling to talk" in public or when in the presence of people they do not know, even though they are actually able to speak and have no physical problems with their ability to speak.

Selective mutism usually begins to appear in preschool age, and often becomes more apparent as children enter elementary school. At this age, the school environment demands higher levels of social interaction skills, and selective mutism can affect a child's learning ability and social development. There are several characteristics of selective mutism 1). Speech impairment: The child is unable to speak in certain social situations, such as at school or when interacting with peers, although they are able to speak in more familiar environments. This impairment lasts for more than a month (except the first month of school) and interferes with the child's academic or social performance. 2). Anxiety: The child usually shows signs of anxiety, such as tension, fear, or withdrawn behavior when asked to speak in front of others. Selective mutism is not a result of other developmental disorders, such as communication disorders or autism spectrum disorders.

From the characteristics above, the most frequently encountered are the inability to speak, especially in elementary school children, which is a transition from early childhood education, the impact of selective mutism is the child's social difficulties, the child will find it difficult to build relationships with peers, then the impact that occurs is the inhibition of the development of knowledge because they tend not to respond to the learning process, selective mutism makes it difficult for educators, especially in receiving learning materials.

One of the causes of selective mutism is the environment and parenting patterns of parents, which have a big impact on the current situation where parents give their children gadgets so that they stay at home rather than being told to play with their peers, this has an impact on the development of children's communication, they tend to focus more on their gadgets so that they are not used to socializing with others.

One of the students at SDN Kaliwates 01 experienced communication disorders, such as being reluctant to talk and interact with peers and teachers, who act as second parents at school. As a result, the child just sits quietly in class without being involved in the learning process. Based on the results of observations and interviews with his family, this behavior does not only occur at school, but also at home. This is caused by the child's habit of using cellphones too often from an

Selective Mutism in Elementary School Children: Do Gadgets Play a Role?

early age. Excessive use of cellphones prevents children from interacting with their surroundings, so that their social skills do not develop optimally. This impact also continues on the development

Mutism that occurs in students in Kaliwates is partly caused by gadgets. Gadgets have a complex role in the context of selective mutism, which can provide benefits or challenges depending on how they are used. The use of gadgets in everyday life has increased significantly, and there are several things that need to be considered regarding the effects of gadgets on selective mutism, including:

1. **Lack of Direct Social Interaction:**

Gadgets, especially when used excessively, can limit children from interacting directly with their peers. Children who use gadgets too often tend to practice less verbal communication, which can worsen social anxiety.

2. **Increase Social Anxiety:**

Several studies have shown that excessive exposure to content on the internet or social media can increase social anxiety in children. They may feel pressured or compare themselves to others who appear more confident online, making them more afraid to speak up in real social settings.

3. **Focus and Concentration Disorders:**

Excessive use of gadgets can also interfere with a child's ability to focus and concentrate. Children with selective mutism who have difficulty communicating may find it increasingly difficult to engage in classroom activities that require attention and involvement.

Selective mutism is an anxiety disorder characterized by the inability of individuals, especially children, to speak in certain social situations despite being able to speak fluently in a comfortable environment. This disorder can have a significant impact on a child's social, emotional, and academic development if not treated properly. Therefore, it is important to understand how to overcome selective mutism.

There are several approaches that can be taken to address selective mutism, particularly by considering the impact of gadget usage on children. First, limiting gadget use is essential; reducing screen time and encouraging children to engage in social activities can help them practice communication skills in real-life situations. Second, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) can be highly beneficial. This therapy focuses on helping children overcome their fear of speaking in front of others and improving their social interaction skills.

Another approach is exposure-based therapy, where children are gradually exposed to situations that trigger their anxiety. For example, they may be encouraged to say one word in class, with exposure increasing over time until they feel more comfortable. Additionally, engaging

children in communication practice through social games or team activities is an effective strategy. These games promote verbal interaction, helping children gain confidence in communicating with others.

Parents also play a crucial role in overcoming selective mutism. It's important for them to understand the condition and the effects of excessive gadget use, allowing them to guide their children in reducing screen time and focusing more on face-to-face interactions. Finally, schools can contribute by fostering a supportive and safe environment where children with selective mutism can communicate gradually, without pressure, enabling them to build confidence at their own pace.

Conclusion

Selective mutism is an anxiety disorder that often occurs in children, characterized by their inability to speak in certain social situations despite being able to speak well in comfortable environments, such as at home. This disorder usually appears in preschool age and becomes more pronounced as children enter elementary school, where the demands of social interaction are increasingly high. Children with selective mutism often have difficulty in building social relationships and responding to learning processes, which impacts their academic and social development. One of the main characteristics that is often found is the inability to speak in school, which causes limitations in social interactions and poses a major challenge for educators in delivering learning materials.

One of the factors that contribute to the emergence of selective mutism is excessive use of gadgets. Children who use gadgets too often tend to be less stimulated to communicate directly, so that their social skills do not develop optimally. Research shows that gadgets can worsen selective mutism through limiting direct social interaction, increasing social anxiety, and disrupting children's focus. The case observed at SDN Kaliwates 01 shows that the use of gadgets from an early age has hampered children's communication and interaction skills, both at school and at home.

To overcome selective mutism, a holistic approach is needed that involves limiting gadget use, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), and gradual exposure-based therapy. In addition, communication training through social games, counseling approaches for parents, and the creation of a supportive school environment are also very important in helping children with selective mutism. With a combination of these steps, children can slowly develop confidence in speaking and build their social skills to support more optimal emotional, social, and academic development.

Selective Mutism in Elementary School Children: Do Gadgets Play a Role?

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Selective Mutism in Elementary School Children: Do Gadgets Play a Role?

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