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The Digital Detox Challenge as a Strategy to Strengthen Students' Mental Health in the Digital Era (Analytical Study at SMP Negeri 49 Bandung and SMP Negeri 72 Bandung)

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ABSTRACT

The development of digital technology has a significant impact on the lives of adolescents, particularly junior high school students. Excessive use of gadgets can impact students' mental health, such as stress, anxiety, impaired learning focus, and decreased social interaction. This study aims to describe the implementation of the Digital Detox Challenge as a strategy to strengthen the mental health of junior high school students. The study used a qualitative approach with descriptive methods. Data collection techniques were carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. The results showed that the Digital Detox Challenge had a positive impact on the mental health of junior high school students. This program contributed to increased emotional stability, learning focus, the formation of healthier gadget use habits, and increased direct social interaction. The program's success was supported by teacher mentoring, the use of daily reflection journals, and students' commitment to changing their digital behavior. The research findings indicate that the Digital Detox Challenge is an effective preventive and educational strategy to strengthen mental health, self-regulation, and the balance between digital and real life in junior high school students.

Keywords: *Digital Detox Challenge, mental health, middle school students, digital technology, social media*

INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology has become an integral part of students' lives. Junior high school students are an age group particularly exposed to gadgets, social media, online games, and various other digital platforms. The presence of technology offers numerous benefits in learning, communication, and access to information. However, uncontrolled technology use can also have negative impacts on students' mental health.

A common phenomenon in schools is that some students experience decreased concentration, difficulty controlling gadget use, are prone to anxiety, and are less able to establish direct communication with those around them. Many students feel anxious when away from their cell phones or social media. This condition indicates a digital dependency that can affect students' emotional and social balance.

Mental health is a crucial aspect of adolescent development because it influences students' learning abilities, social relationships, and character development. Schools are not only responsible for academic achievement but also play a role in creating an environment that supports students' psychological well-being.

One effort that can be made is through the Digital Detox Challenge. This program challenges students to reduce digital device use for a certain period of time so that they can control their gadget habits and develop healthier activities. Through this activity, students are expected to increase their self-awareness of the importance of maintaining mental health amidst the development of digital technology.

Based on these conditions, this study was conducted to determine how the Digital Detox Challenge can be a strategy for strengthening the mental health of junior high school students.

Mental health is a state of being able to manage emotions, think positively, establish good social relationships, and cope with the stresses of daily life in a healthy manner. In adolescence, especially junior high school students, mental health is greatly influenced by the social environment, emotional development, and the use of digital technology.

Students with good mental health tend to be more confident, able to concentrate on learning, and have positive social relationships. Conversely, mental health disorders can be manifested through excessive anxiety, unstable emotional changes, stress, and decreased motivation to learn.

The choice of the mental health of junior high school students in this study is based on the complexity of the challenges of adolescent development in the digital era. Early adolescence is a transitional phase marked by various biological, psychological, social, and emotional changes. At this stage, the development of the prefrontal cortex, which plays a role in decision-making, self-control, and risk

assessment, is not yet optimal. On the other hand, adolescents have a high need for acceptance and recognition from their social environment. These conditions make junior high school students more vulnerable to the influence of digital technology, particularly social media, which is designed to provide instant stimulation through a dopamine-based reward system.

This phenomenon is exacerbated by the increasing intensity of device use among adolescents. Various activities, from communication and entertainment to learning, are now often conducted through digital devices. While technology offers numerous conveniences, excessive use can have various psychological consequences. Many students spend hours each day accessing social media, playing online games, or watching digital content, reducing time for rest, study, and direct social interaction.

In addition to increasing device use, various psychological problems related to digital activities are also increasingly being identified among adolescents. These include increased levels of stress, anxiety, impaired concentration, and even digital addiction. The pressure to always be connected, keep up with trends, and seek social validation through digital media often creates psychological burdens that students are unaware of. Therefore, efforts are needed to help adolescents build a healthier relationship with technology.

In this context, students need to understand the balance between digital and real life. The ability to manage technology use wisely is crucial for adolescents to optimally engage in social, academic, and personal development activities. This awareness is part of the reconciliation process between digital and physical reality, a must for today's young generation.

Furthermore, mental health is no longer viewed as a purely personal issue but has become a crucial part of the educational ecosystem. A healthy mental state influences students' motivation to learn, thinking skills, social relationships, and character development. Therefore, schools need to introduce various preventive and educational strategies to help students maintain their psychological well-being amidst increasingly rapid technological developments.

The Digital Detox Challenge is a practical, structured, and time-bound intervention designed to help individuals manage their digital consumption patterns. Conceptually, this strategy is not simply an attempt to limit device use, but rather a volitional process aimed at shifting control from external forces (device notifications and algorithms) to internal self-regulation. The philosophy behind this strategy emphasizes the importance of "digital balance," a state in which students are able to position technology as a supporting tool, rather than the center of their lives. Through this challenge, students are encouraged to re-evaluate their dependence on the digital world in order to restore psychological well-being in real-life settings.

The theoretical foundation of this research uses Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. This theory explains that human behavior is influenced by the reciprocal interaction between personal, behavioral, and environmental factors. Bandura refers to this relationship as reciprocal determinism.

In the context of the Digital Detox Challenge, changes in technology use behavior depend not only on individual willpower but also on the school, family, and peer environment. This program helps students develop self-regulation skills to control their device use while gaining social support from their environment. Through this process, students learn to build healthier and more responsible digital habits. Thus, the Digital Detox Challenge is not only an effort to limit technology use but also a means of character building and strengthening mental health, in line with the principles of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory.

As a comprehensive strategy, this method integrates preventive and educational functions for junior high school students:

a) Educational Function (Digital Literacy and Self-Regulation): Teaching students the skills to manage technology independently. Students are not only trained to stop using devices but also educated to have full control over when and how technology is used.

b) Preventive Approach (Psychological Well-being): Acting as an early mitigation measure to prevent a decline in mental well-being and character disorders such as apathy or loss of empathy due to the negative impacts of technology.

c) Character Strengthening (Discipline and Attendance): Forming students' character by being disciplined with time and having a full awareness (presence) of life's priorities, both in academic responsibilities and self-development.

Holistically, the Digital Detox Challenge creates a well-being loop for junior high school students. Changes in the Behavioral dimension and healthy lifestyles (such as improved sleep quality and device control) will provide a strong physical foundation for improving the Cognitive dimension of focus and learning. Clearer cognition allows for more stable Emotional management (the emotional dimension), which ultimately facilitates the Social dimension in the form of quality real-life interactions.

The mental health analysis focused on in the Digital Detox Challenge includes emotional, cognitive and learning focus, healthy behaviors and lifestyles, and social and real-life interactions.

METHODOLOGY

This research used a qualitative approach with a case study or phenomenology. This approach was chosen to explore in-depth the experiences of junior high school students during the Digital Detox Challenge and how the challenge subjectively affected their psychological well-being.

The subjects were junior high school students identified as having high levels of gadget use or experiencing early symptoms of digital addiction. Subjects were selected using a purposive sampling technique to ensure participants could provide rich information regarding the impact of the digital detox on their mental health.

To obtain comprehensive data based on existing indicators, the techniques used included:

a. In-depth Interviews

Used to explore changes in the Emotional dimension (anxiety level, mood stability) and the Cognitive dimension (ability to control negative thoughts and focus on learning).

b. Participatory Observation

Researchers observed changes in student behavior at school, particularly related to gadget use patterns during recess and their level of activity in real-world settings and social interactions with peers.

c. Reflective Diary (Digital Detox Journal)

Students were asked to record their daily experiences during the challenge, including noting changes in sleep quality and feelings when away from digital devices.

The primary instrument was the researcher herself (human instrument), supported by an interview guide and observation sheets structured around four key indicators of mental health: Emotional, Cognitive, Behavioral, and Social.

Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which includes:

a. Data Reduction

Filtering interview results and student journals to focus on mental health themes and technology management strategies.

b. Data Display

Organizing data into indicator categories (Emotional, Cognitive, Behavioral, Social) to clearly demonstrate patterns of student change.

c. Conclusion Drawing

Formulating how the Digital Detox Challenge is effective as a practical and preventative solution for students' mental health.

To ensure the validity of the study, source triangulation will be conducted by comparing data from students, teacher observations at school, and parental accounts regarding changes in children's behavior at home, particularly related to sleep patterns and family interactions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted at SMP Negeri 49 Bandung and SMP Negeri 72 Bandung. The aim was to describe the implementation of the Digital Detox Challenge program as a strategy to strengthen students' mental health in the digital age. Data were obtained through observation, in-depth interviews, documentation, and analysis of Digital Detox Daily Journals completed by students during the program.

The analysis showed that the program implementation resulted in positive changes in four key aspects of students' mental health: emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social.

1. Emotional Dimension

According to interviews at SMP Negeri 49 Bandung, most students reported that after participating in the Digital Detox Challenge, they felt calmer and no longer had a strong urge to constantly check their phones. At the beginning of the program, some students reported experiencing boredom and difficulty adapting, but these conditions gradually transformed into new, more positive habits. Several students reported being able to control their anxiety when not using their devices and enjoying daily activities outside the digital world more.

Similar findings were also found at SMP Negeri 72 Bandung. Based on interviews and reflections in their daily journals, students revealed that the program helped them reduce the stress caused by social media. They felt more comfortable, more relaxed, and better able to control their emotions when facing problems at school and in their social circles. Guidance and counseling teachers also observed that during the program, students appeared more emotionally stable and more easily guided in learning activities.

These results suggest that reducing gadget use can support a healthier psychological state by improving emotional regulation and self-control.

2. Cognitive Dimension

Research at SMP Negeri 49 showed significant changes in students' concentration abilities. Interviews revealed that some students were able to study for several hours without being distracted by the urge to access social media or play online games. Some students even stated that they had begun replacing gadget use with reading books and engaging in other more beneficial activities.

Meanwhile, at SMP Negeri 72 Bandung, students revealed that limiting gadget use made it easier for them to understand the material and focus on their schoolwork. Subject teachers also reported that students appeared more active in discussions and were able to maintain attention throughout the learning process.

These findings suggest that the Digital Detox Challenge provides students

with a space to reduce digital distractions, thereby improving their concentration and learning effectiveness.

3. Behavioral Dimension

Observations and documentation at SMP Negeri 49 show that students are beginning to practice discipline in their gadget use, especially at night. The majority of participants stopped using their cell phones before bedtime, resulting in improved quality of rest. Some students even managed to go a day without using gadgets for entertainment.

At SMP Negeri 72 Bandung, daily journal analysis showed that students were gradually reducing their time spent using social media and online games. They replaced these habits with activities such as reading, helping their parents, exercising, and completing schoolwork. The guidance counselor also stated that this behavioral change was evident in the students' increased discipline in participating in learning activities.

These changes demonstrate that the Digital Detox Challenge program not only limits technology use but also encourages the development of healthier and more productive lifestyle habits.

4. Social Dimension

Regarding the social aspect, research at SMP Negeri 49 showed that students interacted more directly with family and peers. Activities such as helping parents, playing with siblings, discussing with friends, and participating in school activities became more frequent after students reduced screen time.

Similar findings emerged at SMP Negeri 72 Bandung. Based on observations and interviews, students reported having more time to talk with family and participate in activities with friends. The guidance counselor assessed that students' interpersonal communication improved and their participation in group activities increased compared to before participating in the program.

This increase in face-to-face interactions indicates that the Digital Detox Challenge is able to help students re-establish a balance between their digital lives and their real-life social lives.

Overall, the research results at SMP Negeri 49 Bandung and SMP Negeri 72 Bandung show a consistent pattern of findings. The Digital Detox Challenge program has a positive impact on students' mental health through four main changes: increased emotional stability, increased focus on learning, the development of healthier gadget use behaviors, and improved quality of social interactions.

Data from both schools also show that the program's success is influenced not only by limiting technology use, but also by teacher support, the use of daily reflection journals, and students' commitment to gradual behavioral changes. Thus, the Digital Detox Challenge can be viewed as a preventative and

educational strategy that supports the development of self-regulation and strengthens students' mental health at the junior high school level.

Based on research findings obtained through observation, in-depth interviews, documentation, and analysis of the Daily Journal Digital Detox, the implementation of the Digital Detox Challenge program at SMP Negeri 49 Bandung and SMP Negeri 72 Bandung demonstrated a positive impact on students' mental health. This program not only focuses on reducing gadget use but also seeks to build students' awareness so they can use technology more healthily, wisely, and in a balanced way.

1. Digital Detox Challenge Improves Students' Emotional Health

The results showed that most students experienced emotional changes after participating in the program. Initially, some students reported feeling uncomfortable and having difficulty reducing their cell phone use. However, after gradually implementing the program, they began to be able to control their urges to continue accessing social media and online games.

Guidance and counseling teachers at both schools also observed that students became calmer, more patient, and better able to control their emotions when facing various situations in the school environment. This suggests that limiting gadget use can help reduce the psychological stress that arises from excessive exposure to digital information.

These findings demonstrate that the Digital Detox Challenge is a form of preventive intervention that can support adolescents' emotional stability by developing self-regulation skills.

2. The Program Helps Improve Focus and Concentration in Learning

Research also shows that reducing gadget use has a positive impact on students' learning abilities. At both Public Middle Schools 49 and 72, students reported that they found it easier to concentrate while studying because they were no longer distracted by social media notifications or the urge to play games.

Subject teachers also observed an increase in students' attention span during the learning process. Students appeared more active in discussions, completed assignments more quickly, and were more engaged in academic activities in class. These findings indicate that controlling technology use can create a more conducive learning environment, thus supporting the improvement of students' cognitive abilities.

3. Establishing Healthier Gadget Use Habits

The Digital Detox Challenge encouraged students to begin managing their gadget use independently. Based on observations and daily journals, students began reducing their cell phone use at night and replacing it with more beneficial activities, such as reading books, helping their parents, doing schoolwork, and exercising.

These changes indicate that the program not only resulted in a reduction in gadget use but also the formation of new, more productive habits. Students' awareness of controlling their technology use is an important indicator of character development and self-regulation skills. The approach used in this program is also considered effective because it does not prohibit technology use outright, but rather teaches how to use it appropriately and responsibly.

4. Improved Social Interaction and Interpersonal Relationships

Another aspect that has changed is students' social interactions. During the program, students began to spend less time online and communicated more directly with family and peers.

At SMP Negeri 49, students reported helping their parents more often and playing with siblings at home. Meanwhile, at SMP Negeri 72, students showed increased participation in group activities at school and more active communication with their friends.

These results indicate that limiting gadget use provides opportunities for students to build better interpersonal relationships. Direct social interaction contributes to the development of communication skills, empathy, and social skills, which are essential for adolescent mental health.

5. Implementation of the Digital Detox Challenge as a Guidance and Counseling Service Strategy

Based on the overall research findings, the implementation of the Digital Detox Challenge can be viewed as a preventative strategy within guidance and counseling services in schools. This program provides a space for students to reflect on their technology usage habits, build self-discipline, and raise awareness of the importance of maintaining a balance between digital and real-life activities. The program's success is also supported by the involvement of guidance and counseling teachers and homeroom teachers, as well as the use of daily reflection journals that help students evaluate their behavioral development during the challenge.

Thus, the Digital Detox Challenge serves not only as a program to reduce gadget use but also as a character education tool that strengthens self-regulation skills, improves mental health, and fosters a culture of healthy technology use within the school environment.

CONCLUSION

Based on research conducted at SMP Negeri 49 Bandung and SMP Negeri 72 Bandung, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Digital Detox Challenge Program has positively contributed to strengthening students' mental health in the digital age. Through activities that limit gadget use, accompanied by mentoring and reflection, students demonstrated behavioral changes that

lead to wiser and more responsible technology use.

Emotionally, the program helped students manage anxiety and improve their emotional control, allowing them to feel calmer in dealing with various everyday situations. Cognitively, students demonstrated improved focus and concentration in learning due to reduced distractions from digital media. Behaviorally, the program encouraged the development of healthier gadget use habits through time management and redirecting activities to more productive pursuits. Meanwhile, socially, students became more active in interacting directly with family, peers, and the school community, improving the quality of their interpersonal relationships.

Overall, this research demonstrates that the Digital Detox Challenge is an effective preventative strategy to support students' mental health while strengthening character, self-regulation skills, and maintaining a balance between digital and real life. Therefore, this program is worthy of consideration as an innovative guidance and counseling service that can be implemented sustainably in the school environment to help students face the challenges of digital technology developments adaptively and responsibly.

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