

## Contemporary Social Interaction and Misbehavior Among Elementary School Students: Challenges of Character Education in the Digital Era

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### ABSTRACT

*The development of digital technology has brought about significant changes to the social interaction patterns of elementary school-aged children. Increasing access to digital media, combined with the dynamics of the social environment in rural areas, has given rise to various forms of deviant behavior among elementary school students, such as socializing with older friends, smoking habits, declining ethics and manners, the emergence of intentions to steal other people's belongings, and even bullying behavior among peers. This phenomenon poses a serious challenge for the implementation of character education in the digital era, particularly in the context of elementary education in rural areas such as Glenmore District and the Banyuwangi Regency. This study aimed to map the trends and directions of scientific studies related to contemporary social interactions, deviant behavior, and character education in elementary school students through a bibliometric approach. The method used is a bibliometric study that searches for scientific articles from reputable databases, such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, over a certain time period. The analysis was conducted on the number of publications, dominant keywords, research theme clusters, and the main actors in the research, including authors, institutions, and countries. The results of the analysis indicate that the themes of deviant behavior in children, the influence of the social and digital environment, and character education have become a dominant focus in international and national studies. However, a significant research gap remains regarding contextual studies of elementary school students in rural areas, particularly in Indonesia. The implications of this research emphasize the importance of strengthening character education that is adaptive to the challenges of the digital era and based on local contexts, as a foundation for formulating relevant and sustainable character education strategies in Glenmore District, Banyuwangi.*

*Keywords: Social Interaction, Deviant Behavior, Elementary School Students, Character Education, Digital Era;*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, the development of digital technology has brought about significant changes to the social interaction patterns of elementary school-aged children. Children who had previously interacted predominantly through traditional play and face-to-face communication are now increasingly accustomed to screen-based interactions through devices, social media, and various digital platforms. In Indonesia, internet penetration among the 5–12 age groups continues to increase. A national survey showed that more than 60% of elementary school-aged children have regular internet access, either through personal or family devices (APJII 2023). This directly influences how children build social relationships, form values, and imitate the behavior they observe in digital spaces and their surroundings.

The dynamics of elementary school students' social interactions in the digital era are characterized not only by the intensity of technology use, but also by changes in the quality of social relationships. Children are more quickly exposed to values, language, and behaviors that are not always appropriate for their psychosocial developmental stages. Previous research has shown that exposure to digital content without adequate guidance can increase the tendency toward aggressive behavior, decrease empathy, and weaken self-control in elementary school-aged children (Livingstone & Helsper, 2010; Wartella et al., 2014). In this context,

elementary schools, as early education institutions, play a strategic role in instilling character values, yet simultaneously face increasingly complex challenges.

These challenges become even more pronounced when compared to the conditions in villages and rural environments. Social environments in rural areas are generally characterized by more open social relations, closeness between residents, and informal patterns of social control. However, these conditions also create space for uncontrolled cross-age interactions, particularly between elementary school students and their older peers. Interactions with older age groups often lead children to imitate behaviors that are not yet appropriate for their stage of moral and social development (Santrock, 2019). In some rural areas, the phenomenon of elementary school-aged children interacting intensively with adolescents and even adults is becoming increasingly common as the boundaries of space and time are weakened by digital technology. (Suhilmiati et al., 2024)

In this context, various forms of deviant behavior have begun to emerge among elementary school students. Reports from child protection agencies indicate an increase in cases of risky behavior among elementary school-aged children, including smoking, disrespectful behavior toward teachers and parents, and taking other people's belongings without permission (KPAI 2022). While not all of these behaviors constitute violations of the law, pedagogically, they reflect a shift in values and weak internalization of character education. Bullying, often considered a minor misbehavior, also has the potential to develop into bullying if not addressed systematically from an early age (Olweus, 2013).

Glenmore District, Banyuwangi Regency, a rural area with distinctive social characteristics, provides a relevant context for studying this phenomenon. Glenmore is known for its relatively large number of elementary schools located in socially and economically heterogeneous village environments. The majority of the population earns a living in the agricultural and plantation sectors with increasing levels of social mobility. (Nuzli et al., 2023) This situation creates a dynamic social interaction space for children, where traditional values, local environmental influences, and digital cultural currents converge in a single social space. Therefore, studying social interactions and deviant behavior of elementary school students in this area is crucial for understanding the real challenges of character education in the digital era.

Although character education has become an integral part of the national curriculum, its implementation at the elementary school level faces various obstacles. One major problem is the gap between the character values taught in schools and the social practices that students experience in their daily lives. Schools emphasize discipline, honesty, courtesy, and responsibility, yet students often encounter social environments that exemplify the opposite behavior, both through direct interactions and digital media (Lickona, 2012). This gap results in character values being taught tending to be normative and less deeply internalized.

Another equally important issue is the limited comprehensive scientific mapping of deviant behavior among elementary school students in the digital age, particularly in rural contexts. Most previous research has focused on adolescents or urban contexts, whereas studies specifically focusing on elementary school students in rural areas are relatively limited. Consequently character education policies and strategies are often formulated without a strong, contextual scientific basis (Creswell, 2018).

Based on these problems, this study aimed to identify global and national research trends that discuss social interactions and deviant behavior among elementary school students. Furthermore, this study aims to analyze the focus of character education studies in the context of the digital era, including dominant themes, methodological approaches, and the research actors involved. (Arifudin et al., 2020) Furthermore, this study is directed at identifying research gaps relevant to the local conditions of Glenmore District, Banyuwangi, so that they can serve as a basis for further research development and the formulation of more contextual character education policies.

The novelty of this research lies in the use of bibliometric methods to systematically map scientific studies related to deviant behavior in elementary school students and character education in the digital era. This approach allows researchers to observe patterns in research development, relationships between themes, and gaps in research that have not been widely explored. Furthermore, this study links the results of the bibliometric analysis to the local rural context, specifically the Glenmore District, Banyuwangi, which has rarely been the focus of research. The specific focus on contemporary forms of deviant behavior at the elementary school level is also an important contribution to enriching the body of character education research in Indonesia.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Social Interaction of Elementary School Students

Social interaction is a reciprocal process that occurs between individuals and other individuals, and with surrounding social groups. Social interaction plays a fundamental role in the formation of personality, values,

and basic social skills in elementary school-aged children. According to the psychosocial development theory, children aged 6–12 years are in the industry versus inferiority stage, where successful social interactions determine self-confidence and the ability to cooperate with others (Erikson, 1968). In this context, elementary school is the primary arena for children to learn to communicate, negotiate, obey rules, and understand social norms.

Elementary school students' social interactions are not limited to relationships with peers in the school environment, but are also influenced by the family environment, community, and digital media. Research shows that more than 70% of elementary school-aged children's social interactions are spent with peers, both at school and in their neighborhoods (Rubin et al., 2015). Peers serve as powerful agents of socialization as they learn about solidarity, empathy, and social acceptance through peer groups. However, these interactions can also have negative impacts if group norms conflict with the values taught at school and within the family. In addition to peers, older peers influence is also a significant factor in shaping children's social behavior. Elementary school-aged children tend to imitate the behavior of individuals perceived as more mature or of a higher social status. Bandura (1977) emphasized that social learning through observation and imitation (observational learning) is dominant in childhood. In the village context, cross-age interactions often occur naturally and intensely, increasing the opportunity for children to imitate behavior that is not yet appropriate for their stage of moral development. Therefore, the quality of children's social interactions is determined not only by the frequency of interactions but also by the character and values instilled in the social environment.

## **2. Deviant Behavior in Elementary School Children**

Deviant behavior in elementary school-aged children can be understood as actions that do not conform to social norms, moral values, or rules that apply within the family, school, and community. According to Merton (1968), deviant behavior arises when there is a discrepancy between the values held and an individual's means of achieving them. In the context of children, deviant behavior is often experimental and influenced by environmental factors, not simply by the intention to violate norms.

Deviant behavior in elementary school students is generally characterized by low self-control, weak understanding of norms, and strong social influence. Data from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection show that approximately 25–30% of problematic behavior cases in elementary school-aged children are related to minor disciplinary violations, such as swearing, being impolite, and harassing peers (KPPPA, 2021). Although considered minor, these behaviors have the potential to develop into more serious problems if not addressed early.

The forms of deviant behavior relevant to the context of this study include early smoking, a decline in ethics and manners, the emergence of the intention to steal other people's belongings, and bullying behavior. Empirical studies have shown that children exposed to smoking behavior in their social environment are twice as likely to try smoking compared to children who are not exposed (Smet et al., 2018). Bullying behavior, often considered part of children's play, in many cases becomes the precursor to bullying behavior when it is done repeatedly and involves an imbalance of power (Olweus, 2013).

## **3. Character Education in the Digital Era**

Character education is a systematic effort to instill positive moral, ethical, and personality values among students. Lickona (2012) defined character education as the process of helping individuals recognize goodness, love, goodness, and practice goodness. In the context of basic education, character education aims to shape students who are faithful, have noble characters, are responsible, and are able to live harmoniously in society. In the digital era, the implementation of character education is facing increasingly complex challenges. Children learn not only from teachers and parents but also from various digital sources that are not always controlled. UNESCO data (2021) show that more than 60% of elementary school-aged children in Southeast Asia are exposed to digital content daily, whether through social media, online videos, or digital games. This exposure carries global values that do not always align with local norms and expected character values.

The challenges of character education in the digital age are also related to a decline in the intensity of quality face-to-face interactions. Research by Wartella et al. (2014) showed that excessive gadget use is correlated with a decline in children's empathy and social skills. Therefore, character education in the digital age requires an adaptive, collaborative, and contextual approach that involves the roles of schools, families, and communities simultaneously.

#### **4. Bibliometric Studies in Educational Research**

Bibliometrics is a quantitative method used to analyze scientific publication patterns based on bibliographic data, such as the number of articles, keywords, citations, and author networks. According to Pritchard (1969), bibliometrics objectively measures and maps the development of scientific knowledge. In educational research, bibliometrics are used to identify research trends, dominant themes, and the direction of research development over a specific period.

The relevance of bibliometric studies to educational research lies in their ability to provide a comprehensive overview of the scientific landscape. Bibliometric analysis enables researchers to identify key research actors, international collaborations, and underexplored research gaps (Donthu et al., 2021). In the context of studying social interactions, deviant behavior, and character education in elementary school students, a bibliometric approach is crucial for understanding the extent to which these issues have been studied and how this research fits within the broader scientific landscape.

### **III. METHODS**

#### **1. Research Design**

This study used a quantitative approach with bibliometric methods to map and analyze the development of scientific studies related to contemporary social interactions, deviant behavior, and character education in elementary school students in the digital era. The bibliometric approach was chosen because it can provide an objective and systematic overview of scientific publication patterns, relationships between research themes, and the main actors contributing to a particular field of study (van Eck & Waltman, 2014). Through bibliometric analysis, this study focuses not only on the narrative content of the literature but also on the structure and dynamics of knowledge developing within the academic community.

A quantitative approach in bibliometric research allows researchers to process publication data statistically resulting in measurable, replicable, and highly objectivist results (Donthu et al., 2021). In the context of educational research, bibliometrics have been widely used to identify research trends, dominant themes, and understudied research gaps, including issues related to character education and student behavior (Zupic & Čater, 2015).

#### **2. Data Sources**

The data sources for this study were Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and Google Scholar, which are reputable scientific databases. These three databases were selected because of their broad publication coverage, high academic credibility, and frequent use in bibliometric research in the education and social sciences (Mongeon & Paul-Hus, 2016). Scopus and WoS were used to obtain reputable international publications, while Google Scholar was used to supplement national and regional literature relevant to the Indonesian context.

The publication year range analyzed in this study was set for the last ten years, from 2014 to 2024. This period was selected to capture the latest dynamics of the development of studies on character education and deviant behavior in elementary school students, particularly those related to the digital era. The types of documents included include scientific journal articles and conference proceedings, because these two types of documents represent the most dominant empirical and conceptual research results in the development of science (Elsevier, 2023).

#### **3. Data Search Strategy**

The data search strategy was systematically conducted using a combination of primary keywords that were relevant to the research focus. The keywords used included social interaction, deviant behavior, misbehavior, elementary school students, primary education, character education, and the digital era. Keyword combinations were arranged using Boolean operators (AND, OR) to broaden and narrow the search results according to the research needs (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006).

Inclusion criteria for this study were : (1) publications discussing elementary school students or basic education; (2) focusing on social interaction, deviant behavior, or character education; (3) published within a specified year; and (4) available in full text. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria were publications focusing on secondary or higher education levels, non-scientific articles, and publications not substantively relevant to the research topic. The data screening process was carried out in stages to ensure that only the most relevant and high-quality publications were analyzed (PRISMA, 2020).

#### 4. Data Analysis Techniques

The bibliometric data analysis was conducted in several stages. First, an analysis of the number of publications per year was used to identify research growth trends in the fields of social interaction and character education for elementary school students. This analysis was conducted by calculating annual publication frequency and visualizing it in the form of a trend graph.

Second, keyword co-occurrence analysis was used to identify the dominant themes and relationships between the concepts in the literature. This analysis is based on the frequency of keyword occurrence and the strength of their association, which can be mathematically represented by the following association strength formula:

$$A_{ij} = \frac{C_{ij}}{C_i \cdot C_j}$$

Where ( $A_{ij}$ ) shows the strength of the relationship between keywords  $i$  and  $j$ , ( $C_{ij}$ ) is the number of co-occurrences of the two keywords, and ( $C_i$ ) and ( $C_j$ ) are the frequencies of occurrence of each keyword (van Eck & Waltman, 2009).

Third, an analysis of authors, institutions, and countries was conducted to identify the main actors and centers of knowledge production in this study. A research theme cluster analysis was then used to group the publications into clusters based on similar topics and keywords. The entire analysis process was visualized using the VOSviewer software, which is widely used in bibliometric studies for its ability to visually and interactively map knowledge networks (van Eck & Waltman, 2014).

#### 5. Relationship to Research Location

Although this study is bibliometric in nature and does not involve direct field data collection, the analysis results are interpreted by considering the local context of the Glenmore District, Banyuwangi. The resulting mapping of themes, trends, and research gaps is used as a basis for understanding the relevance of global and national studies to socio-educational conditions in rural areas. Thus, the bibliometric results are not only descriptive but also contextual, thus providing a scientific basis for strengthening character education that is appropriate for the social dynamics of elementary school students in Glenmore District, Banyuwangi.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 1. Research Publication Trends

The bibliometric analysis results indicate that scientific studies related to deviant behavior and character education in elementary school students have experienced a significant increase in the past decade. Based on a search of reputable databases (Scopus and Google Scholar) with a publication range of 2013–2024, 312 relevant scientific documents were identified. Quantitatively, the publication trend showed an exponential increase, especially after 2018. (Subasman et al., 2025) If expressed as an average annual growth rate, it can be formulated as follows:

$$AGR = \frac{P_t - P_0}{P_0} \times 100\%$$

Calculations show that the annual publication growth rate is approximately 12–15% per year, indicating increasing academic attention to issues of deviant child behavior and character education in the digital era. The highest publication spike was recorded in 2020–2022, which coincided with the increased use of digital technology in children's learning and social lives due to the global pandemic (UNESCO, 2021). These findings reinforce the argument that digital transformation is a crucial factor that drives new dynamics in elementary school students' social interactions.

#### 2. Research Theme Map

Keyword co-occurrence analysis using the VOS viewer software produced a thematic map that grouped the research into several main clusters. The first cluster was dominated by the keywords social interaction, peer relationships, and elementary students, which represented the study's focus on the dynamics of children's social relationships. (Prihantini et al., 2024) The second cluster centered on the terms deviant behavior, smoking behavior, bullying, and moral decline, which emphasized the researchers' attention to forms of deviant behavior in elementary school-aged children. The third cluster featured the keywords character education, moral education, and values education, whereas the fourth cluster highlighted the terms digital era, digital media, and technology use.

This mapping demonstrates a strong link between social interaction, deviant behavior, and character education in the digital era. However, cluster linkages that specifically link character education to rural contexts are relatively weak, indicating a research gap in rural or village areas (van Eck & Waltman, 2014).

### 3. Focus on Forms of Deviant Behavior

A literature review showed that the most frequently studied forms of deviant behavior in elementary school students include socializing with older peers, early smoking, declining ethics and manners, minor theft, and minor bullying. Several studies have reported that children who interact intensively with older age groups are almost twice as likely to imitate risky behaviors, including smoking, compared to children who socialize with peers of the same age (Santrock, 2019). Furthermore, disrespectful behavior toward teachers and parents is often associated with low self-control and a weak internalization of moral values (Gibbs, 2014).

The phenomena of minor theft and bullying behavior also appear to be expressions of moral regulation failure in early development. In international literature, these behaviors are often positioned as early indicators of more complex behavioral problems if not addressed early (Olweus, 2013). These findings are relevant to elementary school settings in rural areas, where social supervision is lax and cross-age interactions are relatively intense.

### 4. Implications for Character Education in Glenmore

Bibliometric findings have direct implications for strengthening character education in the Glenmore District of Banyuwangi. Rural areas characterized by social closeness and collectivist values, provide strong social capital for character education. (Nadeak et al., 2023) However, the mapping results indicate that without systematic management, this social capital can become a breeding ground for deviant behavior. The main challenge lies in the gap between character values taught in schools and students' daily social practices.

On the other hand, opportunities for strengthening character education exist through the integration of community-based approaches, school-parent collaboration, and contextual digital literacy. This study confirms that character education strategies in Glenmore need to be simultaneously adapted to the social realities of the village and challenges of the digital era (Lickona, 2012).

### 5. Theoretical and Contextual Discussion

Theoretically, the findings of this study align with Bandura's social learning theory, which emphasizes that children's behavior is shaped through the observation and imitation of their social environment (Bandura, 1977). Bibliometric findings also confirm the relevance of moral development theory, which states that elementary school-aged children are at a crucial transitional stage in the formation of moral values (Gibbs, 2014). Compared with previous research that has focused more on urban contexts, this study enriches the scientific landscape by positioning the rural context as an important but under-recognized area of analysis.

Thus, this research occupies a strategic position in the map of character education science, especially as a bridge between bibliometric global studies and the contextual needs of basic education in rural areas such as Glenmore District and Banyuwangi.

## V. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the bibliometric analysis conducted, this study concludes that scientific studies on social interaction, deviant behavior, and character education in elementary school students have shown a significant upward trend in the last decade. The increase in the number of publications reflects growing academic attention to the impact of the digital era on the social and moral development of elementary school-aged children. Bibliometric mapping also shows that the dominant research themes center on the dynamics of children's social interactions, the influence of the environment and digital media, and the urgency of character education as a preventive measure against the emergence of deviant behavior.

The results of the theme cluster mapping indicate that, although character education is a widely discussed topic, studies specifically linking deviant behavior in elementary school students to the rural context are still relatively limited. This research gap is an important finding considering that the social dynamics of villages differ from those of urban areas. In the context of Glenmore District, Banyuwangi, the challenges of character education are increasingly complex because children are influenced not only by their local social environment and cross-age relationships but also by exposure to values and behaviors from the difficult-to-control digital space.

Thus, this study confirms that character education in the digital era faces dual challenges: a misalignment between the character values taught in schools and students' daily social practices and a lack of character



education approaches based on local and rural contexts. These findings reinforce the urgency to develop adaptive, contextual, and sustainable character education strategies for elementary school students.

### **Recommendations**

Based on these conclusions, this study recommends that elementary schools and educators in Glenmore District strengthen the implementation of character education through a contextual and collaborative approach. Teachers are expected to not only integrate character values into intracurricular learning, but also reinforce them through role modeling, habituation, and managing students' social interactions within the school environment and the surrounding community. Furthermore, improving digital literacy for teachers, students, and parents is a strategic step toward minimizing the negative impacts of digital technology use.

For regional education policymakers, this study highlights the need to formulate character education policies that are more sensitive to rural social conditions. Local governments are expected to foster synergy among schools, families, and communities through community-based programs that support early character development in students. Providing mentoring programs, teacher training, and policies to strengthen character education based on local data are crucial steps in addressing this challenge.

As a future research direction, it is recommended that future studies combine a bibliometric approach with empirical research, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Field studies in village elementary schools, particularly in Glenmore District, could provide a more in-depth understanding of students' social interactions and deviant behavior. This approach is expected to enrich theoretical understanding and generate more applicable recommendations for character education policies and practices.

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