

## Religiosity of Gadget-Addicted Children: Case Study In Southern Thailand

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### Abstract

This study aims to examine the impact of gadget addiction on the religious morality of Muslim children in Southern Thailand. The phenomenon has emerged alongside the rapid development of digital technology and the increasing integration of gadgets into children's daily lives. The primary objective of the research is to identify the factors contributing to the decline in children's interest in religious activities, the rise of disobedience toward parents, and the decreasing participation in religious education. The study employed a qualitative case study approach, conducted in La'al Village, Saiburi, Pattani, with research subjects consisting of fifth and sixth-grade elementary school students. Data were collected through interviews and documentation, then analyzed descriptively using data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that gadget addiction significantly affects children's spiritual, moral, and social development. Excessive gadget use leads to neglect of religious obligations, weakened ethical interactions with parents, and reduced involvement in religious education.

**Keywords:** Religious Morality; Internet Addiction; Thai Children.

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### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dampak kecanduan gadget terhadap moralitas keagamaan anak-anak Muslim di wilayah Selatan Thailand. Fenomena ini muncul seiring dengan perkembangan teknologi digital yang semakin pesat dan penetrasi gadget dalam kehidupan sehari-hari anak. Tujuan utama penelitian adalah mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang menyebabkan penurunan minat anak-anak terhadap kegiatan keagamaan, meningkatnya kasus

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### Artikel Info

**Received:**

July 14, 2025

**Revised:**

August 19, 2025

**Accepted:**

October 25, 2025

**Published:**

December 10, 2025

pembangkangan terhadap orang tua, serta semakin sepiunya pendidikan agama di lingkungan mereka. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus, berlokasi di Desa La'al, Saiburi, Pattani, dengan subjek anak-anak kelas 5–6 sekolah dasar. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis secara deskriptif melalui reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kecanduan gadget secara signifikan memengaruhi aspek spiritual, moral, dan sosial anak-anak. Penggunaan gadget yang berlebihan menyebabkan mereka mengabaikan kewajiban ibadah, menurunnya etika dalam berinteraksi dengan orang tua, serta berkurangnya partisipasi dalam pendidikan agama.

**Kata Kunci:** Moralitas keagamaan; Kecanduan Internet; Anak-anak Thailand.

## A. Introduction

The rapid development of digital technology has brought a significant impact on children's lives, particularly through the uncontrolled use of gadgets. Gadgets are no longer merely communication tools but have become a lifestyle that shapes the way children think, behave, and interact with their surroundings. On the one hand, gadgets provide quick access to information, entertainment, and learning materials that can foster creativity and broaden horizons. Children can learn many things at the touch of a finger, from reading the Qur'an digitally, joining online classes, to watching educational

content. On the other hand, excessive use of gadgets often creates unhealthy addiction. Children become overly attached to screens, reducing their time for real-world play, avoiding interaction with family and peers, and even neglecting their spiritual obligations such as prayer, reciting the Qur'an, or attending religious gatherings. These negative consequences do not only affect the social and emotional aspects of children such as decreasing empathy and increasing individualism but also weaken their spiritual foundation, as religious values are gradually replaced by instant culture, entertainment, and content that may not align with Islamic

teachings. Thus, gadgets present a paradox for child development: while they can support education, they also pose a serious threat to the formation of children's religious morality if not properly monitored and guided.

The rapid advancement of digital technology has reshaped many aspects of life, including the daily experiences of children. In today's world, gadgets such as smartphones, tablets, and computers have become integral parts of their routines. Besides serving as tools of communication, these devices function as sources of entertainment and learning. Easy access to various forms of content such as social media, online games, and videos often makes children more attracted to the digital world than to educational and religious activities, such as Qur'an recitation, studying Islamic teachings, or attending local religious classes.

The phenomenon of gadget addiction among children, particularly in Southern Thailand, has raised significant concerns regarding their moral and religious development. In a region where the majority of the population is Muslim, families and

communities play a central role in shaping children's religious education. However, with the growing number of children spending more time on digital devices and receiving less supervision from parents or Islamic educational institutions, their engagement in religious activities has noticeably decreased. This has triggered worries that children may lack a proper understanding of Islamic teachings and moral values that should serve as their life guidance.

Beyond its social and emotional impacts, gadget addiction also influences children's relationships with their parents. Many parents, preoccupied with their own busyness, allow children to spend more time with digital devices rather than guiding them directly in moral and religious matters. This condition underlines the importance of finding ways to balance the use of technology with the reinforcement of religious values, so that children grow not only as technologically literate individuals but also with a strong moral foundation.

The aim of this research is to reveal data concerning the decline in the

number of children participating in Qur'an recitation, the increasing cases of children disobeying their parents, and the diminishing interest in Islamic education among children in Southern Thailand. Furthermore, this research seeks to elaborate on the underlying factors that contribute to the rising cases of moral and religious decline among children.

Compared with the study on *The Relationship Between Self-Control and Internet Addiction among Adolescents at SMAN 11 Bandung* (Irawan et al., 2020), there is a clear difference in focus. The Bandung study emphasizes the psychological dimension, specifically self-control as a variable related to internet addiction. In contrast, the present study focuses on spiritual and religious values. Since children in Southern Thailand grow up in a religiously oriented community, the impact of gadget addiction extends beyond psychology, influencing their worship, ethics, and Islamic morality.

Likewise, the study on *Children's Morality and the Urgency of Islamic Education* (Ondeng, 2007) highlights the importance of basic character and

religious education as the foundation of morality. This current research, however, adds a contextual dimension by analyzing how gadget addiction directly influences children's religious morality. Gadgets are not merely seen as entertainment tools, but as external factors that may shift the behavioral patterns of Muslim children, thereby weakening Islamic moral values if not accompanied by strong religious education.

In this regard, the argument underpinning this study is that technology, which was initially introduced to ease human life, has also produced various problems as unintended consequences. The misuse and dysfunctional use of digital technology, particularly the internet, have contributed to the erosion of children's religious values. Therefore, this study will specifically analyze the influence of gadget addiction on the religious morality of children in Southern Thailand, with a focus on the declining number of children engaging in Qur'an recitation, the rise of cases where children disobey their parents,

and the decreasing interest in Islamic education.

## **B. Methods**

This study employs a qualitative research design with a case study approach. The research was conducted in La'al village, Saiburi District, Pattani Province. The subjects of the study were fifth and sixth grade elementary school children in La'al village. The use of this method was considered appropriate as it allows the researcher to engage more closely with the research subjects, given that the researcher directly observes the object of study and acts as the primary research instrument (human instrument). The data collection techniques used were interviews and documentation. Furthermore, the data were analyzed descriptively through data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions, in order to obtain the desired research findings.

## **C. Results and Discussion**

### **Religious Morality Guidance**

Religious morality in children serves as a fundamental basis for shaping their understanding of right and

wrong. Morality is an essential part of one's personality that relates to the ability to build a social life that is harmonious, just, and balanced. Moral attitudes play a vital role in creating a peaceful, orderly, and harmonious society (Sanger & Kasingku, 2023). Morality, in essence, refers to commonly accepted values of human conduct, particularly concerning actions considered proper and appropriate (Ondeng, 2007). The development of good morality requires education, which functions as a crucial element carried out jointly by families, communities, and institutions established to support the growth of children's knowledge and character (Risnawati & Priyantoro, 2021). From an early age, children begin absorbing moral norms from various sources, such as family teachings, schools, and religious or social environments. Early childhood is a formative period when children acquire the knowledge and experiences that prepare them to adapt to adult life and develop essential life skills.

Values such as honesty, compassion, responsibility, and politeness are introduced through

religious stories, rituals, and faith-based social interactions. The love and affection provided by the family act as an emotional stimulus that becomes the gateway for shaping a child's conscience (Rifa'i, 2019). Every stage of a child's growth from birth to adulthood contributes to the formation of personality (Junida, 2019). Thus, morality is not merely introduced as abstract concepts but also as concrete guidelines shaping children's daily behavior. Religious teachings, therefore, serve as instruments for instilling ethics and discipline, guiding children to integrate moral values into their everyday lives.

Furthermore, religious morality nurtures children's spiritual awareness of their relationship with God and others. They are taught that every action carries consequences, both in this life and the hereafter, which fosters motivation to live righteously while avoiding actions contrary to faith. Religious practices such as prayer, almsgiving, and communal worship become more than rituals; they serve as practical lessons in morality. Emotional elements such as empathy and gratitude

also reinforce these values, embedding them deeply in children's character. Families, as the first environment in which children are raised, play a central role in transmitting moral and religious values ('Izza, 2024). Parents, as natural educators, guide children with sincerity and consistency, ensuring that morality is not only taught but also exemplified through daily conduct (Rifa'i, 2019). When children begin to show care, respect, helpfulness, and obedience, these behaviors reflect the internalization of religious values shaped by consistent parental, educational, and social guidance.

For this reason, it is essential for both educators and parents to create an environment that supports and demonstrates the application of religious values. By combining intellectual understanding, emotional engagement, and behavioral habituation, children can grow not only as academically competent individuals but also as morally grounded and spiritually conscious human beings.

### Internet Addiction

The internet, as a global communication network connecting thousands of computer systems managed by governments, universities, businesses, and volunteers (Regiani et al., 2023), has transformed daily life. It provides vast access to information, both reliable and misleading, which children can easily consume. Such conditions often challenge children's ability to filter and evaluate information critically. Excessive internet use particularly for online gaming and social media has been linked to reduced attention span, lower concentration, and weakened academic performance.

Internet addiction can be defined as an excessive reliance on online activities that disrupts daily balance. For school-age children, who are in a crucial stage of developing social relationships, excessive gadget use can hinder their socialization with family and peers (Nurina Hakim & Alyu Raj, 2017). Children at this age are highly impressionable, often imitating behaviors they observe online, ranging from uncontrolled social media usage to compulsive gaming. Overuse of the

internet may lead to compulsive behavior patterns that are difficult to manage (Irawan et al., 2020). Children and adolescents, given their developmental stage, are particularly vulnerable to such risks.

Psychologically, internet addiction is marked by compulsive urges to remain online, creating an imbalance between virtual and real-life experiences. School-age children often use gadgets to satisfy curiosity, which they find stimulating and enjoyable (Kiniret & Susilowati, 2021). As a result, many spend long hours online, leading to stress, anxiety, or irritability when disconnected. Over time, this habit can disrupt time management, academic motivation, and face-to-face relationships, resulting in social withdrawal, sleep disorders, and declining productivity. On cognitive levels, obsessive internet use disrupts focus and productivity; emotionally, it provides temporary escape from stress but worsens emotional instability; socially, it diminishes interpersonal communication and responsibility. Addressing this issue requires parental involvement, self-regulation, and

greater engagement in offline activities, such as physical exercise and social interactions.

### **Children in Southern Thailand**

Children in Southern Thailand grow up in a cultural and religious environment shaped by Islamic traditions and strong community values. In this context, children are viewed with respect but also taught to show obedience and deference to parents and elders. Such practices align with Islamic teachings, which emphasize virtue, respect, and social harmony from an early age. Moral and ethical education is prioritized both in families and schools, aimed at producing not only intelligent but also well-mannered and responsible individuals.

In Muslim households, which are often collective and patriarchal, children are expected to contribute to family responsibilities and uphold household harmony. Islamic schools in the region place great emphasis on discipline, respect for teachers, and moral character-building. However, globalization and the spread of digital technology have begun to influence

local traditions, introducing challenges to preserving cultural and religious values. While the Thai government provides free basic education and enforces child protection policies, socio-economic disparities remain an obstacle, particularly for underprivileged families who struggle to access quality education and healthcare. Despite these challenges, opportunities for improved child welfare are emerging through technological development and national economic growth.

### **Decline in Qur'an Learning**

The rapid advancement of digital technology has resulted in reduced participation among children in Qur'anic learning sessions. Instead of attending religious study circles or practicing recitation, children often prefer gaming, social media, and entertainment videos (Lubis & Siregar, 2021). This shift threatens the religious and moral foundations that Qur'anic education provides. In addition to physical and psychological effects such as sleep disruption and anxiety, gadget addiction limits children's engagement

with spiritual learning and weakens their understanding of Islamic ethics and practices (Kebumen, 2016).

This decline is influenced by multiple factors: lack of parental supervision, the monotony of traditional teaching methods, and insufficient child-friendly religious facilities. Conventional approaches to Qur'an learning are often perceived as boring, making children less interested. Without innovative and engaging methods, alongside parental involvement and supportive communities, religious education risks losing its appeal.

### **Rise of Disobedience Toward Parents**

Another concerning impact of gadget addiction is the growing trend of children showing disobedience, defiance, and disrespect toward parents. Digital content such as violent games, rebellious characters, and disrespectful language is often imitated by children (Andini Pratama et al., 2023). Combined with minimal parental supervision (Sari & Haris, 2023), these influences weaken children's understanding of Islamic values such as respect for parents. Gadget dependency

also fosters impatience, irritability, and aggression, leading to increased tension within families. If left unchecked, such behaviors could undermine the moral quality of future generations.

This phenomenon is compounded by limited religious education, reduced parental guidance, and peer or media influences that normalize negative behaviors. Hence, parental engagement and religious reinforcement are critical to rebuilding moral discipline and family harmony.

### **Declining Interest in Religious Education**

Finally, children's decreasing interest in religious education has become a serious issue. Previously considered the cornerstone of moral and character building (Bafadhol, 2017), religious learning now competes with the stronger attraction of digital entertainment. Children tend to perceive religious lessons as monotonous and less enjoyable compared to interactive games or social media. Factors contributing to this decline include gadget addiction, lack of innovative teaching, insufficient parental

involvement, and unsupportive environments (Puspitasari & Hakim, 2022).

To address this, religious education must adopt engaging and interactive methods, integrate technology in positive ways, and ensure active parental involvement. Creating supportive environments at home, schools, and communities will help sustain children's interest in religious learning and safeguard their moral development.

#### **D. Conclusion**

The phenomenon of internet addiction among children, particularly in Southern Thailand where the majority of the population is Muslim, has revealed significant consequences for their morality and religiosity. Children who spend excessive time on gadgets often neglect religious activities such as reciting the Qur'an, performing congregational prayers, or participating in Islamic study circles. Their dependency on social media, online games, and digital entertainment has shifted their priorities, leading to declining interest in religious education.

Activities that should strengthen their spiritual and moral foundation are increasingly replaced by virtual engagements that provide little to no religious value.

The negative impact of this addiction is also reflected in children's social behavior, including cases of disobedience toward parents, impoliteness, and a lack of Islamic manners. Limited parental supervision, monotonous methods of religious instruction, and an unsupportive environment further accelerate the decline in children's moral quality. The absence of consistent religious values in daily life increases the risk of children losing direction in shaping their character and spiritual identity.

Given this situation, an active role is required from families, Islamic educational institutions, and community leaders to design innovative and relevant strategies of religious education and da'wah that align with the digital era. Religious instruction should be delivered through engaging approaches, integrated with technology, and tailored to children's emotional and intellectual needs. Only through synergy between

technological advancement and religious values can children be nurtured into a generation that is not only digitally competent but also spiritually grounded and morally upright.

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