

Acehnese Creative Dance as an Intervention for Problematic Digital Use in Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT

Excessive use of digital devices among elementary school students in Indonesia has become increasingly concerning as it may lead to digital problematic digital use with negative impacts on cognitive, social, and emotional development. This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of Acehnese creative dance intervention in reducing digital problematic digital use among elementary school students. The research employed a quasi-experimental method with a One Group Pretest–Posttest Design. The sample consisted of 45 students from five elementary schools in Banda Aceh selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a modified questionnaire by Ratuaki (2023) measuring six dimensions of digital problematic digital use. The intervention was conducted over two weeks with seven sessions. The paired sample t-test indicated a significant increase in mean scores from pre-test ($M = 44.82$) to post-test ($M = 63.56$). Since higher scores indicate lower levels of digital problematic digital use due to reverse scoring applied to all negative problematic digital use indicators, this result demonstrates a significant reduction in students' digital problematic digital use levels following the intervention with a size (Cohen's $d = 0.780$). Furthermore, ANOVA results revealed no significant differences across schools ($p = 0.564$). These findings confirm that Acehnese creative dance is effective in reducing students' dependency on digital devices while simultaneously preserving local cultural heritage. The study recommends integrating traditional dance into school curricula as a local wisdom-based digital detox strategy. Beyond its educational relevance, the intervention also demonstrates how cultural practices can be recontextualized to address contemporary challenges faced by younger generations, thus offering insights for educators, policymakers, and future researchers interested in sustainable approaches to digital well-being.

KEYWORDS

Acehnese Dance
Creative Dance
Problematic Digital
Elementary Students
Educational Intervention

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, problematic digital use among children has emerged as a growing concern. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) officially recognizes *Gaming Disorder* as a behavioral problematic digital use in the ICD-11, representing one specific manifestation of problematic digital behavior. Although digital problematic digital use as a broad concept has not yet been formally classified by WHO, numerous studies have demonstrated that excessive digital device use may negatively affect children's cognitive, social, and emotional development. Likewise, UNESCO (2022) has underscored the urgent need for schools to implement strategies that balance digital literacy with mental health promotion. In many countries, the prevalence of gadget dependency among children has been linked to decreased academic achievement, reduced attention span, and social withdrawal (Kuss & Griffiths,

2017; Montag & Walla, 2021). These global findings reinforce the urgency of identifying culturally relevant interventions that are feasible for the school context in Indonesia.

Indonesia ranks among the countries with the highest duration of daily gadget usage. On average, Indonesians spend approximately six hours per day using digital devices (F. Zulfikar, 2024). There is a consensus that gadgets significantly assist in daily activities and facilitate communication among individuals and groups. In response to this assertion, the rapid advancement of digital technology has engendered substantial changes in individual lives, including shifts in the behavioral patterns of students (Danuri, 2019). Among children, early exposure to gadgets has become increasingly common, with national data indicating that a significant proportion of elementary-aged students regularly use digital devices (Kristantyo, 2025; Maulia, 2024). Excessive gadget use may lead to digital problematic digital use, characterized by impaired control, excessive preoccupation, and negative consequences in daily functioning (Mashrah, 2017). As explained by Mashrah in Harsela & Qalbi, five out of ten students who excessively use gadgets may become addicted, resulting in detrimental effects on their cognitive development. This problematic digital use causes their thoughts to be predominantly focused on the games played on gadgets rather than improving their academic performance (Harsela & Qalbi, 2020).

In Aceh, this phenomenon is increasingly evident. Easy access to internet services has resulted in children spending long hours playing online games, watching videos, and engaging with social media (Putri et al., 2023). Many of them utilize Wi-Fi, either at home or in free-access locations such as coffee shops, or they rely on their data packages. Ironically, some of them are willing to skip school in order to play online games (Redaksi, 2021). Reports of school absenteeism and health issues related to excessive gaming further emphasize the seriousness of this issue (Tribun, 2021). If this phenomenon continues to be neglected, its impact on student development will become increasingly severe. Therefore, alternative interventions that can divert children's attention from excessive gadget use are urgently needed.

Art-based practices have been conceptualized and applied differently across clinical, therapeutic, and educational contexts. In clinical settings, dance movement therapy is employed as a structured psychotherapeutic approach aimed at addressing mental health conditions through guided movement facilitated by licensed therapists (Putriani, 2021). In broader psychosocial contexts, dance has also been discussed as an expressive medium that may contribute to emotional release, stress reduction, and social connection, although such effects are often context-dependent and not inherently therapeutic (Koch et al., 2019; Widito, 2011). Within educational contexts, however, dance is not positioned as a form of clinical therapy but rather as a learning-based creative activity that supports students' physical engagement, emotional expression, and social interaction. The concept of creative dance refers to the continuous innovation of movement, ideas, and forms that emphasize exploration, participation, and embodied learning rather than therapeutic treatment (Citrawati, 2024). In school settings, creative dance enables students to learn through bodily experience, facilitating holistic engagement that integrates cognitive, emotional, and motor domains (Gersak, 2014; Payne & Costas, 2021). Thus, while dance may produce psychosocial benefits, its role in this study is analytically framed as an educational intervention with potential supportive effects, rather than as a form of dance therapy.

Integrating traditional dance into school curriculums is a powerful way to prepare students for the digital age while keeping them connected to their roots. This approach aligns with modern educational goals that focus on building the 4Cs: creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and communication (Cameron Frichtel, 2017). In a world dominated by

screens, traditional dance offers a meaningful and multifaceted break from digital life, providing physical, psychological, and social benefits that counteract digital isolation (Georgios et al., 2018). It's a way for students to reconnect with their cultural heritage, understand local traditions, and appreciate the wisdom of their ancestors (Djafar & Djafri, 2024). This is especially vital in rapidly digitizing societies, where young people are at risk of losing touch with their cultural identity. By making traditional dance part of the school day, educators can tackle the growing issue of digital problematic digital use while actively preserving cultural traditions. Beyond that, dance is an accessible and affordable tool for boosting student well-being, making it an ideal solution for developing countries. Ultimately, weaving creative dance into education is a smart, forward-thinking strategy that addresses psychological, educational, and cultural needs all at once.

Interventions grounded in local wisdom are often discussed in the literature as contextually relevant approaches that align educational activities with students' cultural environments (Yohana et al., 2024). In the Acehese context, traditional dance has historically functioned as a medium for social interaction, value transmission, and communal participation. However, in this study, local wisdom is not treated as an empirical variable nor measured through specific indicators or instruments. Instead, it is positioned as a contextual foundation that informs the design and cultural embedding of the intervention. The primary analytical focus of this research remains on changes in students' digital problematic digital use levels, while local wisdom serves to enhance relevance and engagement rather than as a directly tested causal factor.

The Acehese creative dance, developed from traditional forms such as Saman, Seudati, and Ratoh Jaroe, is characterized by structured, rhythmic, and synchronized group movements (Restela & Narawati, 2017). Beyond its aesthetic and cultural dimensions, these movement patterns require sustained attention, bodily coordination, and temporal synchronization among participants (Hulfadila, 2025). From a behavioral perspective, such structured physical engagement may support attention regulation and impulse control by directing students' focus toward coordinated tasks and collective movement sequences. In addition, active participation in group-based dance provides non-digital sources of reward through physical exertion, social interaction, and collective achievement, which may function as a form of reward or dopamine substitution (Shalihah, 2021). Thus, rather than merely reducing screen time through substitution of activities, Acehese creative dance is analytically positioned in this study as a movement-based educational intervention that engages attentional, behavioral, and reward-related processes relevant to the reduction of digital problematic digital use.

In elementary schools, there exists a subject titled Arts and Culture, which encompasses dance, visual arts, music, and theater. In the domain of dance, students are instructed in the mastery of movements involving the head, arms, hands, body, and legs as related to traditional dance (Restian, 2019). The Acehese creative dance, which integrates several traditional dances with creative elements, may serve as a novel model for dance education. This intervention, grounded in local wisdom, is more readily accepted by students due to its proximity to their daily lives. Despite various efforts to address digital problematic digital use among students, there remains a significant lack of dance-based interventions, particularly those developed from traditional dance forms.

Several previous studies have highlighted the utilization of Acehese creative dance in various contexts. Prasika Dewi Nugra, Sabri Gusmail, and Benni Andiko (Nugra et al., 2022) explored the management of movement and the use of digital audio in the process of dance creation in Banda Aceh; however, their focus was limited to choreography skills. The

research conducted by Nadra Akbar Manalu and Haria Nanda Pratama employed audiovisual media in the teaching of creative dance for students at the State Special School in Jantho, yet it did not address aspects of digital addictive behavior. Furthermore, the study by Nadra Akbar Manalu and Inas Ghina (Manalu & Ghina, 2024) has demonstrated that Acehnesse creative dance can be utilized as a therapeutic medium to reduce depression scores in patients with mental disorders, although the context is primarily focused on adults.

To date, there has been no empirical research evaluating the effectiveness of digital-based Acehnesse creative dance as an educational intervention to reduce gadget dependency among elementary school students. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by examining the extent to which digital Acehnesse creative dance intervention can assist in lowering students' gadget problematic digital use levels, while simultaneously reinforcing the preservation of local culture within the educational context. Consequently, Acehnesse creative dance holds significant potential as an innovative solution for reducing students' reliance on gadgets, while also preserving regional culture. The research questions posed in this study are: Is the Acehnesse creative dance intervention effective in reducing gadget problematic digital use among elementary school students? What are the differences in students' digital problematic digital use levels before and after the Acehnesse creative dance intervention? And are there differences in the outcomes of the Acehnesse creative dance intervention based on the students' school origins?

METHOD

This study employed a quasi-experimental approach using a One Group Pretest–Posttest Design. This design was selected to examine changes in students' problematic digital use before and after participation in an Acehnesse creative dance intervention. While this design allows for preliminary evaluation of intervention effects in a natural school setting, it does not include a control group and therefore does not fully eliminate potential threats to internal validity.

The research was conducted in five public elementary schools in Banda Aceh City: SD Negeri 10, SD Negeri 47, SD Negeri 52, SD Negeri 60, and SD Negeri 62 Banda Aceh. School selection was carried out at the institutional level using random selection from public elementary schools with high accreditation status and large student enrolment, in order to ensure institutional feasibility and administrative accessibility.

At the participant level, purposive sampling was employed. Students from grades 4 to 6 who met the inclusion criteria as many as 45 students—namely, exhibiting moderate to high levels of problematic digital use—were selected to participate in the intervention. This two-stage sampling approach distinguishes between institutional selection (schools) and individual participant selection (students), thereby addressing different practical and methodological considerations.

Data were collected using a questionnaire adapted from Ratuaki (2023) to assess problematic digital use. The instrument was contextually adapted for Acehnesse elementary school students through linguistic simplification, age-appropriate wording, and cultural relevance adjustments. Prior to the main data collection, the adapted questionnaire was pilot-tested with a small group of students with similar characteristics to evaluate item clarity, comprehensibility, and response consistency. Feedback from this process was used to refine several items, indicating that the instrument was functionally appropriate for exploratory intervention research, although full psychometric revalidation was beyond the scope of the study.

The intervention consisted of Acehnese creative dance activities derived from Seudati and Laweut dance forms. Following the pretest, students identified as having moderate to high problematic digital use participated in seven intervention sessions over a two-week period, each lasting approximately 60 minutes and facilitated by six trained instructors using a standardized activity guide. Data analysis employed descriptive statistics to summarize pretest and posttest scores and inferential statistics to examine intervention effects. A paired sample t-test was applied when normality assumptions were met based on the Shapiro–Wilk test; otherwise, the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was used. All analyses were conducted at a significance level of 0.05.

Several methodological limitations should be acknowledged. The use of a one-group pretest–posttest design makes the study susceptible to maturation effects, testing effects, and history bias, and the absence of a control group limits causal interpretation. In addition, although contextual adaptation and pilot testing were conducted, the instrument did not undergo full-scale psychometric revalidation for age and cultural specificity. The short duration of the intervention also restricts conclusions regarding long-term behavioral change. Accordingly, the findings should be interpreted as preliminary evidence, and future studies are recommended to employ controlled designs and extended follow-up periods.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Students

This study involved 45 elementary school students from five different schools. According to Table X, the majority of respondents were from SDN 47, comprising 16 students (35.6%), followed by SDN 53 with 9 students (20.0%), SDN 60 with 8 students (17.8%), and both SDN 10 and SDN 62 with 6 students each (13.3%).

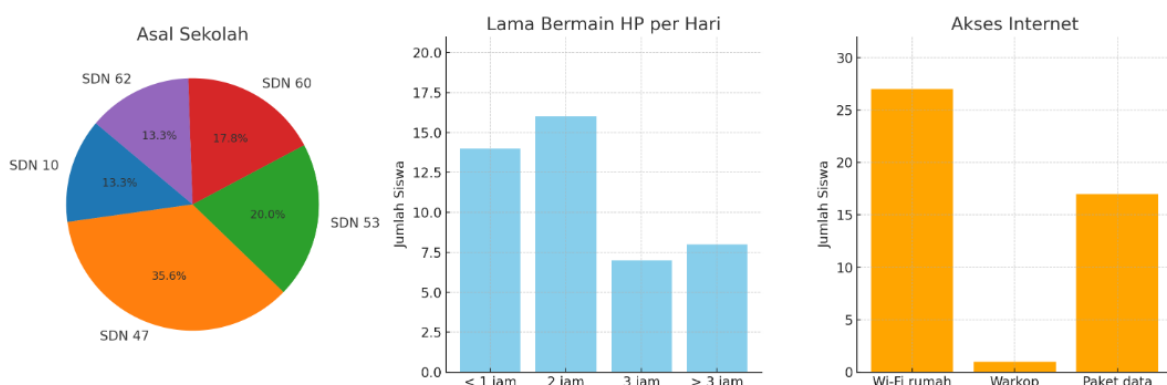


Figure 1. Digital Profile of Elementary School Students

In terms of daily device usage, the majority of students utilized devices for 2 hours (35.6%), followed by usage of less than 1 hour (31.1%), more than 3 hours (17.8%), and 3 hours (15.6%). The internet access utilized by students predominantly came from home Wi-Fi (60.0%), followed by data packages (37.8%), with only a small fraction accessing the internet through coffee shops (2.2%).

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics serve to provide an overview of the research data for the pre-test and post-test groups. Based on the analysis presented in table 1, the Pre-Test scores exhibit a minimum score of 38 and a maximum score of 55, with a mean value of 44.82 and a standard deviation of 4.136. In contrast, the Post-Test scores show a minimum score of 55

and a maximum score of 75, with a mean value of 63.56 and a standard deviation of 4.794. Formulants, it can be inferred that the average post-test score increased by 18.74 points compared to the pre-test. This finding indicates that following the intervention, there was a positive change observed among the research participants.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-Test	45	38	55	44.82	4.136
Post-Test	45	55	75	63.56	4.794
Valid N (listwise)	45				

Normality Assumption Test

The normality test is conducted to determine whether the pre-test and post-test data are normally distributed. The Shapiro-Wilk test is employed due to the sample size being less than 50 respondents. Based on the analysis results (see Table), the significance values (p-values) obtained are Pre-Test = 0.178 and Post-Test = 0.551. All significance values are greater than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that the data in both groups (Pre-Test and Post-Test) are normally distributed. This result indicates that the normality assumption is satisfied, allowing for the continuation of data analysis using parametric tests, specifically the Paired Sample T-Test, to examine the differences in scores before and after the treatment.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Paired Samples

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pre-Test	.115	45	.168	.964	45	.178
Post-Test	.082	45	.200*	.978	45	.551

The results of the Paired Samples Statistics analysis indicate that the mean score of the Pre-Test is 44.82 (SD = 4.136), while the mean score of the Post-Test increased to 63.56 (SD = 4.794) with the same number of subjects (N = 45). The standard error of the mean for the pre-test is 0.617, and for the post-test, it is 0.715. These values suggest a significant difference in the mean scores between the pre-test and post-test. This finding provides preliminary evidence of the intervention's impact on reducing smartphone problematic digital use levels among students.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Paired Samples

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-Test	44.82	45	4.136	.617
	Post-Test	63.56	45	4.794	.715

Effect Size

The results of the analysis of Paired Samples Effect Sizes indicate that the difference between the Pre-Test and Post-Test scores exhibits a high effect size. The Cohen's *d* value is 0.780, while the value with Hedges' correction is slightly higher at 0.787. According to Cohen's interpretation (Cohen, 1988), an effect size of ≥ 0.8 is considered large, whereas a value approaching 0.5 falls into the medium effect size category. Therefore, these results can be interpreted to mean that the intervention implemented has a significant impact on reducing the level of smartphone problematic digital use among students. Furthermore, the 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranges from -29.003 to -18.993, all of which are below zero. This reinforces the finding that there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores, with the post-test scores being considerably lower than the pre-test scores.

Table 4. Paired Samples Effect Sizes

Pair 1	Pre-Test - Post-Test	Cohen's <i>d</i>	standardiser	Point Estimate	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower	Upper
			.780	-24.003	-29.003	-18.993
		Hedges' correction	.787	-23.798	-28.755	-18.831

Based on the results of the ANOVA analysis, an *F*-value of 0.914 with a significance level of 0.564 was obtained. Since the significance value is greater than 0.05, it indicates that there were no statistically significant differences among respondents based on their school of origin. This finding suggests that the school of origin did not exert a meaningful influence on the variables examined. In other words, although the respondents came from different schools with diverse backgrounds, such differences did not produce significant variation in the outcomes or characteristics measured.

Table 5. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for School Origin

The School of Origin					
	Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig.
Between Groups	15.428	16	.964	.914	.564
Within Groups	29.550	28	1.055		
Total	44.978	44			

Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that Acehnese creative dance may function as a meaningful educational intervention for addressing problematic digital use among elementary school students. Rather than indicating mere behavioral substitution, the results point to the potential of structured, culturally grounded movement activities to redirect students' attention, engagement, and social interaction away from excessive digital device use. This interpretation aligns with prior literature emphasizing embodied activities as mechanisms for supporting self-regulation and emotional engagement in children (Jaelani & Purnama, 2022; Nugrohaji, 2025).

Previous studies have largely examined dance within therapeutic, cultural, or pedagogical innovation frameworks. For instance, research by Nugra et al. (2022) focused on creative dance innovation and movement management, while Manalu and Ghina (2024)

emphasized media-assisted dance instruction for students with special needs. Although these studies demonstrate the educational and expressive value of dance, they do not explicitly address digital behavioral regulation as an outcome. In this regard, the present study extends existing literature by situating creative dance within the context of contemporary digital challenges faced by elementary school students, thereby contributing a novel educational perspective to the discourse.

The observed changes may be understood through several interrelated psychological and pedagogical mechanisms. From a behavioral standpoint, participation in synchronized and rhythm-based group dance requires sustained attention, impulse control, and coordinated action, which may counter patterns of fragmented attention commonly associated with excessive digital engagement. Additionally, the rewarding nature of physical movement, social interaction, and collective achievement may offer alternative sources of gratification that compete with the immediate rewards typically derived from digital device use. Pedagogically, Acehese creative dance fosters discipline, motor coordination, and collaborative skills, enabling students to engage in meaningful real-world interactions rather than isolated digital activities. However, it is important to note that these mechanisms are theoretically inferred and were not directly measured in this study.

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. The use of a one-group pretest–posttest design without a control group limits causal inference and makes the results susceptible to maturation effects, testing effects, and contextual influences during the intervention period. It is also possible that short-term factors such as novelty effects, increased adult supervision, or heightened student motivation contributed to the observed outcomes. Furthermore, the relatively brief duration of the intervention restricts conclusions regarding the sustainability of behavioral change over time. Differences in school culture, extracurricular exposure, or students' prior familiarity with traditional dance may also influence the effectiveness of similar interventions in other settings.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the Acehese creative dance intervention is effective in reducing levels of problematic digital use among elementary school students in Banda Aceh. The analysis revealed a significant increase in post-test scores, with an average improvement of 18.74 points and a large effect size (Cohen's $d^* = 0.780$), confirming the substantial impact of the program. No significant differences were found based on school origin, indicating the consistent effectiveness of the intervention across various locations. These findings support the position that creative dance serves not merely as an activity substitute but as a structured educational intervention that operates through mechanisms of sustained attention, behavioral regulation, and psychosocial fulfillment—competing with the instant rewards offered by digital devices.

The practical implications of this study encourage the integration of locally grounded creative dance into arts and culture curricula or extracurricular programs as a strategy for promoting digital well-being in schools. For policymakers in Aceh especially, these results provide empirical support for developing similar programs that link cultural preservation with addressing contemporary childhood issues. For future research, more rigorous experimental designs with control groups and longitudinal studies are recommended to examine the sustainability of effects and to explore the psychological and neurological mechanisms underlying these behavioral changes.

Overall, Acehese creative dance offers a culturally relevant, sustainable, and strengths-based educational solution to support younger generations in navigating digital challenges.

This approach not only reduces dependency on digital devices but also strengthens cultural identity, social skills, and balanced child development in the digital age.

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