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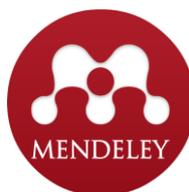# Article information

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Early Childhood Imitation Behavior Towards Tiktok Movements And Speech

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Abstract

General Background: The widespread use of social media platforms such as TikTok has introduced highly engaging short-video content that is frequently accessed by young children. **Specific Background:** Children aged five to six are in a developmental stage where learning occurs through observation and imitation of visual and auditory stimuli. **Knowledge Gap:** Previous studies mainly discuss the general presence of TikTok in children's lives, while limited research explains the specific forms of movements and speech imitated by early childhood learners in school environments. **Aims:** This study aims to identify the TikTok content watched by children and describe imitation behavior in movements and speech among students at TK BA Aisyiyah Temon. **Results:** Using a descriptive qualitative case study involving 20 children aged 5–6 years, data from observations, interviews, and documentation show that 14 children demonstrated imitation behavior. Movements such as "kambing mbe," "walking hap hap hap," and "tor monitor ketua" were repeatedly performed, while speech imitation appeared through viral phrases spoken without understanding their meaning. **Novelty:** The study documents specific patterns of viral movement and speech imitation among early childhood learners in a classroom context. **Implications:** The findings indicate the importance of parental supervision, digital literacy guidance, and collaboration between families and schools in guiding children's exposure to social media content.

Highlights:

- Viral video gestures were frequently reproduced during play activities.

- Spoken phrases from online clips were repeated without understanding their meaning.

- Higher device exposure at home corresponded with stronger mimicry patterns in class.

Keywords*:* Imitation Behavior, Early Childhood, Tiktok, Movement and Speech

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Introduction

The development of social media technology has brought significant changes in the way people interact, communicate, and enjoy entertainment. The way people engage has changed with the advancement of social media technology. TikTok, which has now become one of the most popular platforms, allows young children to create, watch, and share short videos with music, visual effects, filters, and other interactive features. According to [1], TikTok has become one of the fastest-growing social media platforms in the world due to its ability to provide easily accessible, visually engaging entertainment content, and to encourage users to participate in trends and challenges. As more families own digital devices, TikTok usage has become increasingly popular among teenagers and adults, as well as children aged five to six years old. The short video format allows for repeated viewing and active engagement without parental supervision, according to research examining children's use of social media.[2]

Piaget's cognitive development states that children between the ages of five and six are in the preoperational stage. This is marked by an increased ability for symbolic thinking, but they have not yet reached the stage of logical thinking and mature evaluation. As a result, children absorb visual stimuli impulsively and do not perform effective cognitive filtering of the content they watch. This condition leads to an increased likelihood of imitating behaviors frequently seen in the video content they consume.[3] This tendency to imitate is further reinforced by TikTok's personalized algorithm system, the For You Page (FYP), which organizes content based on users' viewing patterns, increasing the likelihood of imitation. This allows children to watch media trends repeatedly. Empirical studies show that short video algorithms can accelerate the process of behavior imitation by increasing the intensity of exposure to certain content among young users without strict filters.[4] Thus, the study also found that frequent use of TikTok by young children can lead to behavioral changes, including a tendency to imitate popular content often seen on the platform. This finding aligns with case study findings showing that children often mimic the language style, expressions, and interaction patterns that appear in content on TikTok.[5] This situation aligns with the idea of mediated learning, where digital media play an important role in children's socialization, sometimes even more so than traditional face-to-face communication. Digital media are not just a source of entertainment; they also create norms, values, and behavioral practices that can influence children's social and moral development from an early age. [6]

The influence of this digital media is also seen on various other platforms that offer similar audiovisual stimuli. For example, [7] It was found that YouTube Kids content with audio and visual conversations can help children's language development. Despite the filter features, the results in improving speaking skills greatly depend on the duration of access and the intensity of parental guidance to ensure vocabulary is correctly imitated. Children are starting to use interactive games in addition to video platforms; indicating that games like Free Fire can affect cognitive development because children begin to imitate the rules, symbols, and strategies present in the game.[8] This indicates that imitation occurs in both thinking patterns and movements. Nevertheless, it was found that imitation can actually benefit vocabulary acquisition and better speaking skills when directed at high-quality content, such as the Islamic Stories Channel. The results show that children's imitation of audiovisual media heavily depends on the type of content provided to them and the supervision they receive.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) can also explain the existence of TikTok as a social learning medium. According to Bandura, humans learn through observation, imitation, and modeling. In this context, people imitate the behavior of others from models they see in their surroundings, either directly or through social media. Children become active observers on TikTok and imitate the movements, facial expressions, and speech of content creators, resulting in imitative behavior. Social learning theory becomes increasingly relevant in the digital era because children's attention and memory are driven by fast-paced visual content, music, and interactive features of short video platforms like TikTok. Repeatedly presenting engaging audiovisual content can enhance children's retention of observed behaviors. In Indonesia, the For You Page (FYP) algorithm allows children to see local viral content that uses everyday language, including regional languages, which they can use to communicate. Most research shows that frequent use of TikTok is correlated with a tendency to imitate underage behavior. However, the type of imitation and the duration of exposure largely depend on the situation and parental supervision.[9]

Based on initial observations in the field, the imitative behavior exhibited by children includes various viral trends, such as the "Velocity" movements, "kambing mbe" from the Mayaza Channel, "jalan" from the Kingelish Kids Channel, "Velocity Dada dada sayornara," "Velocity tor monitor ketua," "Velocity lagu sabar," and "tor monitor ketua" from other content. Even in play activities and daily interactions at school and at home, these movements and expressions are often mimicked. The phenomenon of imitation in early childhood is influenced by the dominance of entertainment content on TikTok Indonesia compared to educational content. According to several studies, children's content often violates the principles of early childhood education and can encourage imitative behavior without understanding its meaning. [10] and To socially adapt to the people around them, children can be compelled to imitate the actions or words of others. Case studies in East Java show that imitative behavior increases with the amount of time spent watching television in the family environment.[12]

The impact of this imitative behavior has two sides. For example, children's gross motor skills and creativity can be enhanced through movements like "velocity" and "kambing mbe," as well as the walking song "hap hap hap." However, words like "duh sayang ngapunten e sak estu" or "tor monitor ketua" often do not have educational meaning and tend to harm children's moral development because they do not align with social and cultural norms. According to previous research, TikTok content may have a greater impact on the imitative behavior of young children, especially without parental or teacher supervision.[10] and [11]. Children tend to imitate viral and visually appealing content without understanding its moral value, which can lead to inappropriate behavior. [12][13]

TikTok influences imitative behavior in young children, especially in terms of movements and speech, according to several

studies. According to some research, children are more likely to imitate dances, words, and language styles used in TikTok content, particularly when exposed intensively and without parental guidance.[10]. Some studies suggest that imitation can enhance children's creativity and self-expression. However, its negative effects, such as rude language and behavior that does not align with social norms if the content is not properly filtered, are a concern for researchers.[11] Quantitative research found that the use of social media affects children's imitative behavior. However, family and social components remain the main factors[14]. As stated by [15] and [16] Parental supervision and age-appropriate content selection are very important to reduce the negative effects of TikTok use on children. Research in Kuningan found that children aged 5-8 years who used TikTok for 2.5 hours per day tended to imitate mukbang activities and makeup tutorials. As a result, they no longer wanted to study and preferred adult entertainment content. This phenomenon shows that intensive exposure affects physical movements as well as the consumption of age-inappropriate content. Local case studies such as Temon are becoming increasingly important because of this.[17]

TikTok imitation also affects children's social-emotional traits. Research has found that children who watch TikTok too frequently tend to have less social interaction and play with peers[18]. Other research. [12] They found that viral movements and speech from TikTok were used by kindergarten students in group play. Although excessive visual interest can enhance motor creativity, this study also found that it can disrupt concentration during learning. Imitation, however, is not always harmful.[19] In the UNP Kediri Proceedings, it was found that imitation on TikTok can increase children's creativity and social interaction if the content consumed is accompanied by adult guidance and is educational. However, uncontrolled imitation can affect the uniqueness of a child's behavior and create social pressure to follow viral trends. Research conducted by found that using TikTok at an early age does not have a significant impact on children's social-emotional development[20]. This suggests that TikTok is still weak despite having an influence, and adults need to help make it better. Meanwhile, qualitative research conducted through interviews [21] found that imitating TikTok content tends to reduce children's social interaction because they prefer to play with devices independently. However, the study also showed that children's creative expression can increase if TikTok use is guided and directed by teachers or parents.

The main difference between this study and previous research is that previous studies tended to discuss the general impact of TikTok, whereas this study examines what types of content are watched by young children, specifically viral movements and speech that young children imitate on TikTok, and how these behaviors have both positive and negative effects on child development. Some researchers suggest that children should learn digital literacy from an early age to reduce the negative impact of social media use. By learning digital literacy, children can be guided to use social media in a healthier way, recognize the limits of social media use, and understand the meaning of the behaviors they imitate. Families and schools work together to turn social media imitation into a learning experience that supports the development of positive character in children.[22]Based on the observations made by the author at TK BA Aisyiyah Temon, the researcher is interested in conducting a study titled: "Imitative Behavior of Early Childhood Children Towards Movements and Speech on TikTok: A Case Study of Early Childhood Children." This research is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions in the field of early childhood education, particularly regarding how social media influences children's behavior. The results of the study are also expected to serve as a basis for developing character education and digital literacy strategies that are suitable for children's needs in today's digital media era.

Method

A case study is a type of research that examines cases in real-world settings to gain a better understanding of a phenomenon[23] This study uses qualitative descriptive research. According to sources, qualitative descriptive research is used in this study to systematically and factually describe phenomena according to the environment in which the research is conducted. However, as stated, qualitative research prioritizes thorough observation of the research subjects in their natural environment. The goal is to understand the meaning of actions, behaviors, and social interactions carried out by the people involved. This study is descriptive in nature and emphasizes the process and social context rather than the results or final products; the researcher acts as the main instrument and is directly involved in the natural research environment. What early childhood children watch and imitate on TikTok, as well as how imitation behavior is displayed in play activities and social interactions at school, is the focus of this study. TK BA Aisyiyah Temon is located in Sawoo District, Ponorogo Regency. Initial observations indicated that children imitate movements and words from TikTok videos during play activities and social interactions, which is why this location was chosen. This study involved twenty early childhood children in one group, namely twenty children in the TK B group, aged between five and six years. Overall, the study involved 20 children. The principal, who also serves as the class guardian, participated to understand the use and impact of TikTok on children's behavior. Observation, interviews, and documentation were used to collect data. Observations were conducted to identify what children imitate on TikTok and the types of imitative behaviors that emerge after watching it, which was the focus of the observation. Interviews were conducted with the classroom teacher, who also served as the principal, to obtain information about children's habits in accessing TikTok, both at home and at school. Documentation in the form of field notes, photos, and videos supported the research findings. Three main components of the interactive data analysis model developed by Miles and Huberman were used to analyze all the data: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions or verification. This model was applied continuously until the data reached the saturation required to ensure the completeness and comprehensiveness of the research results. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing children's observations, teacher interviews, and video documentation to ensure data credibility.

Results and Discussion

A. Overview of the Research Subject

This research was conducted at TK BA Aisyiyah Temon involving 20 children from group B aged 5–6 years as the main subjects of the study. Children in this age range are at a developmental phase where observational, imitative, and social exploration abilities develop rapidly. Based on initial observations carried out by the researcher during learning and play activities at school, it was found that not all children exhibited imitative behavior towards TikTok content. Out of the total 20 children systematically observed over several sessions, 14 children showed clear and repeated imitative behaviors in both movements and speech originating from TikTok content. The remaining 6 children did not exhibit such imitative behavior despite being in the same social environment. This difference reflects the variation in children's experiences accessing digital media at home as well as their level of exposure to TikTok content, such as daily viewing frequency and session duration. These factors are an important basis for understanding children's behavior in today's digital era.

To strengthen the findings of qualitative and contextual observations, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with 14 parents as well as with the class teacher who also serves as the principal and acts as a direct teaching teacher. The limited number of parents interviewed was due to time constraints and the busyness of parents in their daily activities, as well as limited opportunities for face-to-face meetings amidst a tight school schedule. Nevertheless, the interview data obtained has represented the characteristics of children who both exhibit and do not exhibit imitative behavior proportionally, making it still relevant for providing an in-depth explanation of the phenomenon being studied. These initial findings indicate that imitative behavior in early childhood does not emerge uniformly, but is influenced by individual children's experiences in interacting with digital media. This is in line with research stating that differences in the intensity of TikTok exposure in the family environment lead to variations in social behavior and imitation in children aged 5–6 years.

B. Observation Results of Imitative Behavior in Early Childhood

The observation results show that imitation behavior in early childhood at TK BA Aisiyah Temon appears in two main forms: movement imitation and speech imitation originating from TikTok videos. The observation was conducted directly while the children participated in free play activities, rest time, and social interactions with peers.

Table 1. Results of Observing Children's Imitative Behavior

No	Children Category	Number of Children	Description
1	The child exhibits imitative behavior	14 children	Mimicking movements and/or speech from TikTok
2	The child does not exhibit imitative behavior	6 children	Do not imitate TikTok movements or speech
	Total	**20**	

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that out of the 20 children who were the subjects of the study, 14 children were identified as exhibiting imitation behavior, while 6 children did not show such behavior. Children who exhibited imitation behavior appeared to actively mimic certain movements or spontaneously repeat viral words from TikTok, both individually and in groups. These results reinforce the findings [17] which states that young children tend to imitate digital behaviors they often see, especially when the activity is repeated and considered enjoyable. In this context, TikTok becomes a strong visual and auditory stimulus for children.

Meanwhile, children who do not exhibit imitative behavior tend to focus on the games available at school and do not show a tendency to mimic movements or speech from TikTok videos. This indicates that imitative behavior does not appear evenly across all children, but is influenced by the intensity of social media exposure and phone usage habits within the family environment. These findings reinforce the assumption that TikTok plays a significant role in shaping children's imitative behavior, but it is not the only determining factor. The family environment and parental supervision remain important factors that influence whether or not imitative behavior emerges in early childhood children.

C. Forms of Imitative Behavior Displayed by Children

Imitative behavior observed at TK BA Aisyiyah Temon shows a fairly consistent pattern, especially towards viral TikTok content, which has a fast rhythm and features visually appealing movements. This form of imitative behavior is divided into two categories: movement imitation and speech imitation.

Table 2. Forms of Movement Imitation Behavior

No	Types of Movements Imitated	TikTok Content Source
1	Velocity "Goat mbe"	Mayaza Channel
2	Walking "walking" hap hap hap	Kingelish Kids Channel
3	Velocity "Chest chest sayonara"	Viral content
4	Velocity "Tor monitor chief"	Viral content
5	Velocity song "Be patient"	TikTok music content
6	Velocity "That's enough of adding more matters"	Viral content

Based on Table 2, the types of movements most frequently imitated by children come from TikTok content with velocity concepts and children's songs or popular songs presented in an engaging way. Movements such as "kambing mbe," walking

"hap hap hap," and "tor monitor ketua" are often performed by children enthusiastically and repeatedly. These movements generally involve coordination of the body, head, and hands and are performed in rhythm with the music. Children make these movements while waiting for their turn in activities, during free play, and even when interacting with peers. Movement imitation behavior can occur in groups in certain situations. For example, one child may start a movement and another child will follow. This behavior can spread quickly in the classroom. This finding indicates that TikTok movements are highly appealing to young children because they are simple, repetitive, and easy to imitate, making them suitable for the characteristics of children's motor development.

Table 3. Forms of Speech Imitation Behavior

No	Words/Lyrics That Are Imitated	Description
1	"Oh dear, I'm really sorry"	Repeatedly said without understanding the meaning
2	"Chairperson monitor"	Used when joking
3	A snippet of a viral song's lyrics	Repeated in play activities

Based on Table 3, speech imitation behavior is shown through the repetition of words, phrases, or portions of viral song lyrics originating from TikTok. Utterances such as "duh sayang ngapunten e sak estu" and "tor monitor ketua" are often repeated by children, both while playing and when interacting with friends. Generally, children do not yet understand the words or phrases they are saying; these utterances are usually spoken in a high-pitched and fast intonation, imitating the speech style found in TikTok videos. This indicates that the imitation process focuses on sound and expression rather than understanding the meaning of the language. This phenomenon aligns with the characteristics of language learning in early childhood, where children tend to imitate sounds they frequently hear without considering the context or the value of the meaning of the utterances.[5]

D. Parent Interview Results

Table 4. Results of Parent Interviews

No	Children Category	Number of Parents
1	The child exhibits imitative behavior	10 parents
2	The child does not exhibit imitative behavior	4 parents
	Total	**14 parents**

Based on Table 4, out of 14 parents interviewed, 10 parents stated that their children exhibited imitative behavior, while 4 parents said their children did not show imitative behavior toward TikTok content. Parents whose children exhibited imitative behavior generally reported that their children often watch TikTok on their parents' phones, especially during leisure time, when parents are busy, or before bedtime. Parents who claimed that their children engaged in imitative behavior said that their children often use their phones at home, usually for 30 minutes to more than an hour each day, including after playing in the afternoon, after bathing or before sleep, and when parents are busy doing household chores or working from home. In such situations, the phone is usually used to calm the child and keep them from being fussy. Almost all parents in this group agree that TikTok is the app most frequently used by children. This is because of its engaging movements, lively music, and short videos that keep children from getting bored and tend to make them watch repeatedly. Some parents say that children first got to know TikTok through their parents' phones or other family members, such as older siblings, cousins, or even neighbors.

Parents say that children often imitate movements from TikTok videos, especially fast movements (velocity), dance moves, and combinations of hand, body, and head movements that follow the music melody. This behavior usually appears spontaneously when children watch TikTok or afterward, such as when they play, hear a song they remember, or interact with their peers and family. Children's expressions when imitating these movements are usually cheerful and enthusiastic, sometimes even excessively; this can include jumping around, laughing to themselves, and trying to stop moving. Imitation behavior is also seen in speech and movements. Parents say that their children often say words, phrases, or snippets of song lyrics from TikTok videos. These utterances are often said without context and are not appropriate to the situation at hand. Parents know that children imitate the language and intonation from TikTok videos, such as speaking quickly, in a high-pitched tone, or in an exaggerated style, but they do not yet understand the vocabulary or sentences they are saying. Most parents admit that they cannot monitor TikTok regularly for their children. The main problems they face are limited time, fatigue after work, and the need to complete household chores. As a result, parents do not always know what their children are watching because children often use their own phones. Parents also say that although this imitative behavior makes children more active and expressive, they become unfocused and difficult to stop, and this behavior is often carried over to school.

Meanwhile, parents who assert that their children do not follow examples say that TikTok is very limited and is rarely used by their children. Children in this group are more likely to access additional entertainment, such as playing games, playing outside, or watching YouTube. Parents also emphasize that they tend to monitor their children using their phones and set clear rules about how long and what can be used. Imitative behaviors or expressions from TikTok are not found at home or at school under supervision. Overall, the results of the parent interviews indicate that the emergence or absence of imitative behavior in young children is greatly influenced by the intensity of TikTok exposure, phone usage habits at home, and the level of parental supervision and guidance. Children with more frequent access to TikTok and less supervision tend to show imitative behavior of movements and speech, while children who are guided and have their media use restricted do not show imitative movement behavior

E. Results of the Principal's Interview

Based on in-depth interviews with the Head of BA Aisyiyah Temon, who also serves as the homeroom teacher for TK B, it was found that the behavior of imitating movements and speech from TikTok videos is real and frequently observed in the school environment, especially among children in group B aged 5−6 years. The principal conveyed that some children exhibit behavior of mimicking certain movements and speech resembling TikTok content, even though the school never provides children access to social media. This behavior most often appears outside of core learning activities, such as during free play, recess, and when children interact with their peers.

During the learning process, the teacher tries to condition the classroom so that the children remain focused, thereby minimizing imitative behavior. In terms of movement, the principal observed that the children often displayed fast movements (velocity) resembling viral TikTok trends, such as the "kambing mbe," "walking," and other movements that follow the rhythm of popular songs. These movements are performed spontaneously, without instructions from the teacher, and often appear when the children hear a snippet of a song or see their friend performing a similar movement. The children often imitate movements they have seen before, even if they do not know the purpose or meaning of the movements. The principal stated that the children can follow the rhythm of TikTok songs by combining movements of the hands, head, and body simultaneously. Although the coordination is not yet entirely precise and structured, the children appear to move quickly, energetically, and expressively, which aligns with the characteristics of the TikTok content they are imitating. This indicates that the type of visual shows children frequently watch influences their ability to remember and replicate movements.

In addition, this imitation of movements occurs more often in groups than in individuals. The school principal stated that students imitate each other, so one student would mimic a TikTok movement from another. This phenomenon causes imitative behavior to spread quickly among children, especially during free play. Imitative behavior spreads through social interaction between children and their parents. Besides movements, the principal also observed the imitation of viral TikTok phrases or words. Children often say phrases like, "tor monitor ketua," and "duh sayang ngapunten e sak estu." The phrases are delivered with a high intonation, fast tempo, and speaking style that mimics TikTok content creators with exaggerated facial expressions. The principal stated that children do not understand the meaning of these words and use them only for joking or role-playing with friends[24].

According to the principal, the imitation behavior mostly comes from the home environment, not from school. Children who are used to watching TikTok at home through their parents' or other family members' phones then bring this behavior to school. This is reinforced by the finding that not all children show the same imitation behavior: children who often imitate usually come from families that have freer access to phones, while children from families that have restrictions on gadget use tend not to show TikTok imitation behavior. From the perspective of its impact on learning, the principal stated that imitation behavior has two sides. The movements made on TikTok can help children improve their gross motor skills, courage to speak, and self-confidence. The child becomes more active and courageous in moving compared to his or her peers and becomes more energetic and brave. However, meaningless speech and the child's tendency to repeat certain movements can disrupt students' concentration, especially during class activities. This can also affect the development of good language skills. According to the homeroom teacher and the principal, the school tries to control and guide the child's imitative behavior. Teachers usually remind the child to redirect their attention to more beneficial activities: playing games, singing children's songs, or participating in age-appropriate learning activities. The principal also emphasizes the importance of parental involvement, especially in choosing what the child watches at home and supervising their phone use. Overall, the results of interviews with teachers indicate that the behavior of young children imitating movements and speech from TikTok is a real phenomenon influenced by the intensity of exposure to digital media at home. Collaboration between parents and schools is very important in guiding children so that the imitation process is directed in a more positive and educational way. On the other hand, schools act as parties that supervise, guide, and mitigate the negative impacts.

The results of this study indicate that the imitative behavior of young children at TK BA Aisyiyah Temon is influenced by the TikTok content that children frequently consume. This finding is in line with Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) and which explains that children learn through observation and imitation of models considered interesting and frequently seen. The majority of children imitate TikTok content that is viral, has a fast rhythm, and visually appealing. This finding supports previous research results [10] and which states that TikTok serves as a powerful social learning tool for young children. These results are also in line with research which found that social media can influence children's patterns of social interaction in the school environment. In terms of impact, imitative behavior has two sides. TikTok movements can help develop children's gross motor skills, confidence in self-expression, and creativity, as stated by Putri et al. However, imitation of speech that is not educationally meaningful has the potential to affect children's language development and social values. The difference between children's observation results and parent interviews indicates that not all parents are aware of their children's imitative behavior at home, making collaboration between schools and parents very important in supervising and guiding social media use for young children.

Conclusion

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that TikTok content influences the emergence of imitation behavior in early childhood children at TK BA Aisyiyah Temon. Out of 20 children in group B aged 5−6 years, most children showed imitation behavior in the form of copying movements and speech sourced from TikTok content that is viral and visually appealing. The imitation behaviors observed included velocity movements and repetition of speech or song lyrics without understanding their meaning and context. These findings indicate that early childhood children learn through observation and imitation, as explained in social learning theory, so the intensity of social media exposure and lack of supervision are important factors affecting children's behavior. Although imitation behavior has positive potential in developing motor skills

and creativity, without proper supervision, such behavior may also negatively impact children's language, social, and moral development. Based on these conclusions, it is recommended that parents increase supervision and guidance regarding their children's use of TikTok by limiting viewing time and selecting content that is age-appropriate and educational. Teachers and schools are also expected to play an active role in directing children's imitation behaviors through positive learning activities and by strengthening communication with parents regarding the child's development. In addition, efforts are needed to strengthen digital literacy from an early age so that imitation behaviors arising from social media can be directed into learning tools that support the child's optimal development.

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