

## **CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL SKILL FORMATION: A THEORETICAL REVIEW AND CURRENT SOCIAL PHENOMENA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Social skills are an important aspect of children's development that affects their ability to interact, adjust and build healthy interpersonal relationships. This study aims to theoretically and empirically review children's social skills, by highlighting the process of their formation from an early age, the implications of low social skills, and the challenges faced by Generation Z children in the current social context. The method used is a literature review by analyzing various scientific journals, books, and previous research results. The results show that children's social skills are in the moderate category, with assertiveness being the weakest aspect. Factors such as parental education level, parenting, school environment and exposure to digital media play an important role in influencing the formation of social skills. Low social skills result in difficulties in interpersonal relationships, emotional instability, decreased academic performance, and increased social risks such as bullying, isolation and depression. The phenomenon of weak social ethics in some Generation Z reflects a failure in the formation of social values and skills early on. This study emphasizes the importance of synergy between families, schools and communities in strengthening children's social skills through training, character education and policies that support children's social-emotional development. Recommendations are directed at the need for sustainable social interventions and further research related to the effectiveness of social skills training programs in various social and cultural contexts.

**Keywords:** social skills, children, development, Generation Z, character education.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Children are part of a population that is always interesting to study from various perspectives, both related to their problems and needs, their potential and characteristics, as well as the stages of development that have been described by many experts. One important aspect in the process of child development is social skills, which is the ability to establish relationships and interact effectively with their social environment. These skills

reflect the extent to which children can understand and apply values, norms and ethics in everyday life.

One of the studies that highlighted this issue was conducted by Subardhini, Sakroni, and Berliana (2023), which showed that the process of forming children's social skills by parents was still moderate. This study measured social skills from three aspects, namely empathy, participation, and assertiveness, with results of 73.29%, 68.96%, and 57.80%, respectively. This finding shows that although the formation process is already underway, there is still considerable room for further development, especially in helping children become confident, cooperative and able to express their opinions in a healthy manner.

The study also underscores the importance of parents' education level in the process of shaping children's social skills. Parents who have a higher educational background tend to have a better understanding of the importance of social interaction, as well as more appropriate strategies in directing children to adaptive social behavior. The higher one's education, the broader the knowledge and insight in educating children, including in instilling essential social values.

Social skills are not innate, but can be learned and developed. This is confirmed by Cartledge and Milburn (in Chen, 2006) who state that social skills training is a training process that allows individuals to learn to provide positive responses to the environment and reduce negative responses. This view is reinforced by Stuart and Laraia (2005) who mention that social skills can be learned by anyone, including by those who initially do not have these abilities. Other empirical evidence comes from a study by Subardhini, Sofiani, and Hasbi (2025), which showed that even people with mental disorders (ODGJ) who have low social skills can experience significant improvements after receiving intervention through behavior modification techniques. They became more active in worship and were able to resist bad influences from the environment, such as smoking invitations.

The phenomenon of low social skills is also seen in groups of children and adolescents, which has implications for various problems in their lives. Research by Subardhini, Riyadi, and Sakroni (2024) shows that children with low social skills are at risk of having difficulty in regulating emotions, being vulnerable to bullying, having difficulty in establishing friendships, showing aggressive behavior, having a weak self-concept, experiencing academic failure, concentration disorders, to social isolation and depression. This finding is in line with Machmud's (2013) statement that low social skills in children are one of the main sources of various social problems, because children tend to choose aggressive actions to resolve conflicts, which ultimately makes them rejected by their social environment.

This condition is even more relevant when it is associated with the current social phenomenon involving Generation Z. Many people are concerned that this generation is showing a lack of social skills. Many people are concerned that this generation has shown a decline in manners and etiquette when compared to previous generations. They are often considered to be less polite, unethical, and lack empathy in social interactions. This

phenomenon raises a critical question: does the lack of social skills from childhood contribute to the character crisis in today's youth?

To answer this question, an analysis that draws on theories of child development and conceptual approaches to social skills is required. Thus, this paper aims to examine children's social skills from a developmental perspective, analyze the factors that influence them, and relate them to contemporary social phenomena in Generation Z. Through this approach, it is hoped that a more complete and comprehensive understanding of the importance of early social skills formation will emerge, as a foundation in forming a civilized, ethical generation that is able to live harmoniously in society.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The writing of this article uses a literature review approach as the main method in examining the phenomenon of children's social skills from the perspective of development and current social dynamics. Literature review is a method used to explore and analyze information from various sources of scientific literature in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the topic discussed. This method was chosen because it can systematically bridge theoretical understanding and empirical findings, as well as synthesize the phenomena that are developing in society. The data sources used in this writing come from various types of scientific publications, including reputable national and international journals, scientific books, and the results of previous research relevant to the theme of children's social skills. Among the main sources of reference are the results of research by Subardhini et al (2023, 2024, 2025) which examine the process of forming children's social skills by parents, the psychosocial impact of low social skills, and social skills interventions in vulnerable groups. In addition, the authors also refer to developmental theories from Erik Erikson, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Lawrence Kohlberg's moral theory to support conceptual analysis. The analysis techniques used are descriptive qualitative and comparative. Qualitative descriptive techniques were used to describe, explain and interpret key concepts such as social skills, the factors that influence them and their impact on children's development. Meanwhile, the comparative approach is used to compare the phenomenon of social skills in today's generation of children (Generation Z) with previous generations, as well as analyze the differences in social education approaches applied in the context of family, school, and community. By using this method, it is hoped that this paper can make a scientific contribution that is reflective and critical of the importance of the formation of children's social skills, as well as present alternative solutions based on theory and research results to strengthen the role of cross-sectors in building a generation that is socially intelligent and ethical.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Research Results Related to the Formation of Children's Social Skills**

Social skills in children are crucial elements that determine their success in building interpersonal relationships, adjusting to the environment, and forming a healthy social

character. In this context, several studies conducted by Subardhini and her colleagues in 2023, 2024, and 2025 made significant contributions in enriching the understanding of how children's social skills are formed, especially in relation to the role of parents and environmental factors. One of the key studies that informs this discussion is the study by Subardhini, Sakroni and Berliana (2023), published in the Asian Social Work Journal. This research is entitled *Children's Social Skills: A Study of The Process of Shaping Children's Early Social Skills by Parents in Indonesia*. This study explores the process of shaping children's early social skills by parents, using a quantitative approach that measures three main aspects of social skills, namely empathy, participation, and assertiveness. The results showed that the overall process of shaping children's social skills was in the moderate category. The details are: 73.29% for the empathy aspect, 68.96% for the participation aspect, and 57.80% for the assertiveness aspect. These figures show that children's social skills have begun to be formed, but still need to be improved, especially in the assertiveness dimension which shows the lowest results.

This study specifically highlights the role of parents as the main agent in the formation of children's social skills. The role of parents as the main agent in the formation of children's social skills is crucial. Baumrind (1967) asserted that parenting, especially authoritative parenting, contributes to children's social and emotional development, where children who get a balance between warmth and discipline tend to be more confident and have good communication skills. Vygotsky (1978) also emphasized that children's interactions with parents act as scaffolding in their social learning, where parental guidance helps children understand social norms and interaction skills. Meanwhile, Grolnick & Farkas (2002) showed that parental emotional involvement, open communication, and consistent social support contribute to children's increased empathy, adaptability, and emotional control in social interactions. Through daily interactions, parenting, and modeling, parents become the first and main actors in introducing children to social values, empathy, responsibility, and healthy ways of communicating. However, the formation of these social skills is highly dependent on the quality of parents' knowledge, insight and awareness of the importance of social education from an early age.

Parents' involvement in guiding children in the social context, according to the results of the study, varies greatly depending on the parents' educational background. Parents' involvement in guiding children in a social context, according to the results of the study, varies greatly depending on the parents' educational background. Bornstein et al. (2011) stated that parents with higher levels of education tend to be more active in providing social and cognitive stimulation to their children, so that children more easily develop good social skills. Dearing et al. (2006) also found that parents with higher education more often engage in quality interactions with their children, such as reading together, discussing, and teaching social skills through direct experience. Furthermore, Bradley & Corwyn (2002) emphasized that parents' education level not only affects how much they are involved in guiding their children, but also how they implement more

responsive and communicative parenting, which ultimately supports children's social development. Meanwhile, Haveman & Wolfe (1995) point out that children from families with lower levels of parental education tend to have weaker social skills, as they receive less guidance in navigating healthy social interactions.

This is reinforced by data showing that the higher the parents' education level, the more likely they are to be active in shaping their children's social skills. This is reinforced by data showing that the higher the education level of parents, the more likely they are to be active in shaping children's social skills. Duncan et al. (1994) found that parents with higher levels of education tend to be more involved in interactions that support children's social development, such as providing guidance, verbal stimulation, and building an environment conducive to social interaction. In addition, Sylva et al. (2004) also stated that parents with higher education are more aware of the importance of children's social-emotional education and are more active in implementing parenting strategies that encourage the development of social skills, such as effective communication, modeling positive behavior, and encouraging participation in a healthy social environment. Parents with higher education generally have a better understanding of the importance of social aspects in child development, have greater access to information, and are more open to participatory and communicative parenting approaches.

These findings are in line with another study conducted by Subardhini, Riyadi, and Sakroni (2024), published in *Santhet: Journal of Educational History and Humanities*. In this study, the focus was on the impact of low social skills on the psychosocial well-being of children and adolescents. The study found that children and adolescents who have weak social skills tend to have difficulties in managing emotions, are more prone to aggressive behavior, have difficulty in establishing relationships with peers, and tend to withdraw from the social environment. Other impacts noted were low self-concept, impaired concentration, and a tendency to experience depression. This 2024 study provides empirical evidence that social skills are not only important in a social context, but also have direct implications for children's psychological and academic aspects. Children who are unable to establish healthy social relationships often experience social isolation, have difficulty participating in group activities, and are more likely to be victims or perpetrators of bullying. Sakroni (2025) The phenomenon of bullying in education has interfered the process of individual development and is at risk of causing harm. In the long run, these deficiencies can shape patterns of deviant behavior, disrupt the education process, and reduce the overall quality of life of the child.

Interestingly, another study by Subardhini, Sofiani, and Hasbi (2025), published in the *International Journal of Innovative Research and Scientific Studies*, expanded the scope of the research by showing that social skills can not only be trained in psychologically healthy children, but can also be developed in individuals with psychosocial barriers, including People with Mental Disorders (ODGJ). The study showed that an intervention based on behavior modification techniques can improve the social skills of ODGJ, especially in the context of religious discipline and the ability to refuse

negative invitations such as smoking. The results of this intervention showed significant improvements in worship behavior and healthy social decision-making ability. These findings suggest that social skills are dynamic and can be trained in anyone, provided the intervention approach is appropriate.

The implications of these three studies are very important in understanding the process of children's social skill formation. First, social skills do not necessarily develop naturally, but require structured and continuous guidance from the child's closest environment, especially parents. Second, parents' educational background plays a crucial role in shaping children's social interaction patterns, which then affect the extent to which children are able to respond adaptively to their environment. Third, the successful formation of social skills does not only depend on parenting approaches, but is also strongly influenced by the capacity of the social environment, including schools and the wider community, in providing space and support for healthy social interactions.

When linked to the theory of children's social development, the results of the study are in line with Bandura's social-cognitive theory, which states that children learn from social models around them, especially from authority figures such as parents. In this process, children observe, imitate, and internalize social behaviors displayed by adults. Therefore, parents who are able to demonstrate positive and constructive social behaviors consistently, will have a major influence on the formation of children's social skills. Kohlberg's theory of moral development also provides an important perspective that children's social development goes through certain stages, which are influenced by their cognitive abilities and social environment. Children who are raised in an environment that is communicative, supportive and responsive to social values will more easily understand the concepts of morality and social ethics that apply in society.

The link between parental education and children's social skills can also be analyzed through Bronfenbrenner's developmental ecology approach. This theory emphasizes that child development is influenced by interactions between interconnected systems, ranging from microsystems (family, school) to macrosystems (culture, public policy). In this case, parental education is an important part of the microsystem that directly affects the dynamics of children's social development. Highly educated parents tend to have better quality interactions with their children, provide an environment conducive to discussion, give children the opportunity to express their opinions, and provide stable emotional support.

It should also be noted that education is not the only factor that determines the success of social skills formation. Other factors such as family communication patterns, child characteristics, digital media, and peer influence also play an important role. For example, a child from a highly educated family who does not receive emotional closeness and warmth from their parents is still at risk of experiencing social difficulties. Conversely, parents with a low educational background but a high commitment to positive parenting can also successfully shape their children's social skills. The development of children's social skills should be seen as a complex process that requires the involvement of not only

parents, but also educational institutions, communities and the state. There is a need for public policies that support children's social skills training programs in schools, parenting counseling for parents, and educational media that promote positive social values.

The three studies conducted by Subardhini et al have made a real contribution in enriching the understanding of how children's social skills are formed, the factors that influence them, and how they impact on children's social and psychological lives. The research emphasizes the importance of synergy between parental education, parenting and social interventions to shape children who are empathetic, cooperative and assertive, and able to face social challenges in the contemporary era in a civilized and responsible manner.

### **Implications of Low Social Skills in Children and Adolescents**

Social skills are an important foundation in an individual's life from early childhood to adulthood. Vygotsky (1978) in his social development theory emphasizes that children learn through social interactions with people around them. He argues that social skills develop through direct experience in a social environment, where children gain an understanding of the norms, values and rules that govern human relationships. Strong social skills assist individuals in building healthy connections and increase their adaptive capacity in social life. Gresham & Elliott (1990) assert that good social skills are an indicator of one's success in various aspects of life, including interpersonal relationships, academic success and professional careers. They developed a model of social skills that includes communication, cooperation, empathy and emotion regulation as key factors that influence an individual's social and psychological well-being. These skills are not only related to the ability to establish social relationships, but also determine how individuals face challenges in various aspects of their lives. For children and adolescents, low social skills can have a serious impact on interpersonal relationships, emotional management, academic achievement and overall mental health. Gresham & Elliott (1990) assert that children with low social skills tend to have difficulty in establishing and maintaining relationships with peers, which can lead to social isolation as well as an increased risk of behavioral problems such as aggressiveness or withdrawal from the environment. Denham (2006) also points out that poor social skills are closely related to children's inability to regulate emotions, which can lead to difficulties in understanding and responding adaptively to social situations, increasing the risk of anxiety and depression in adolescence. Furthermore, Wentzel (1991) found that weak social skills can negatively impact academic achievement, as children with low social skills often experience barriers in cooperating with classmates, participating in group activities, and communicating with teachers effectively. As a result, they are more prone to learning difficulties and a lack of academic motivation, which ultimately results in low academic achievement. This section takes an in-depth look at the implications of low social skills in children and adolescents, based on empirical findings and a review of developmental theory.

Healthy interpersonal relationships are one of the key indicators of successful social skills. Children and adolescents who have low social skills tend to have difficulties in establishing and maintaining positive relationships with others. They may experience barriers in understanding other people's feelings, inability to conform to social norms, and difficulty in conveying their ideas and feelings appropriately. Lacking the ability to empathize, actively participate and be assertive, children often misread social situations, resulting in responses that are out of context. For example, children who are unable to constructively express feelings of anger tend to exhibit aggressive behavior or, conversely, become passive and withdrawn. In interactions with peers, this can lead to rejection, misunderstandings or even repeated conflicts.

Research by Subardhini, Riyadi and Sakroni (2024) shows that children who experience social skills deficits tend to have unstable relationships with peers, teachers and family members. They are more prone to feeling lonely, unaccepted, and lacking adequate social support. This can trigger feelings of worthlessness, low self-esteem and social withdrawal. In the long run, unhealthy interpersonal relationships during childhood and adolescence can have an impact on relationship patterns that are carried into adulthood. Individuals who are not accustomed to building healthy communication tend to develop problematic relationship styles, such as manipulative relationships, emotional dependence, or even violence in social relationships. Social skills are closely related to the ability to regulate and manage emotions. Children who have low social skills usually also have difficulty in recognizing and expressing their emotions appropriately. They are not only unable to understand other people's emotions, but are also less able to understand their own feelings, which ultimately leads to an inability to respond to emotional situations wisely.

According to Denham (2006), emotion regulation is an important ability in the formation of social skills, as it allows individuals to adapt their emotional responses to social demands. Children who fail in emotion regulation tend to show impulsive behavior, are easily frustrated, and often experience uncontrollable emotional outbursts. This condition is not only detrimental to themselves, but can also disrupt the social environment around them. Poorly managed emotions can also lead to internalizing problems, such as anxiety and depression. Children who feel socially maladjusted will tend to experience ongoing psychological distress. They begin to doubt their abilities, feel shy or fearful in social interactions, and eventually withdraw from society. Research shows that social anxiety disorders and depression in adolescents often stem from experiences of social rejection, a sense of not being accepted, and a lack of emotional support from the environment.

Social skills also play a role in supporting children's success in the school environment. The learning process at school not only focuses on cognitive aspects, but also demands social skills, such as the ability to work together, effective communication, as well as discipline and responsibility. Children with low social skills tend to face barriers in actively participating in class, working in groups, or asking for help from teachers when



experiencing learning difficulties. Several studies have shown that good social skills are positively correlated with high academic achievement. This is due to children's ability to adjust to the learning environment, establish harmonious relationships with teachers and friends, and feel comfortable in classroom situations that demand interaction. Conversely, children who are unable to adapt socially often experience stress in the school environment, feel depressed, and ultimately show low academic performance.

Research by Milyartini (2016) shows that low social skills are associated with various academic problems, such as difficulty in understanding instructions, inability to complete group tasks, and loss of motivation to learn. In the long run, this condition can cause children to fall behind in academic achievement, which has an impact on low self-confidence and future expectations. One of the biggest risks of low social skills is the increased likelihood of bullying, both as a victim and as a perpetrator. Children who lack adequate social skills are often easy targets for bullying behavior because they are perceived as weak, different, or unable to defend themselves. Conversely, children who experience social frustration because they are unable to interact healthily can also vent their emotions in the form of aggressive behavior towards others. Aggressive behavior is one form of reaction to the inability to deal with conflict constructively. Children who are unable to convey feelings of anger verbally and rationally will be more likely to use physical or verbal violence. They perceive aggression as a legitimate way to solve problems or get what they want. In this case, low social skills contribute to the formation of problematic behavior patterns that can continue into adulthood if left untreated.

Children with low social skills also tend to experience social isolation, which is the inability to join peer groups. They are often not invited to group activities, feel rejected, or are unable to fit into social dynamics. This isolation leads to a deep sense of loneliness, loss of belonging and reduced social support. As a result, the child becomes increasingly withdrawn, which then deteriorates their social skills in a repetitive cycle. These conditions, if prolonged, can lead to mental health disorders such as depression. Depression in children and adolescents is often characterized by loss of interest, changes in sleeping and eating patterns, feelings of hopelessness, and thoughts of self-harm. In many cases, depression in adolescents stemming from social problems often goes undetected early on because the symptoms are considered part of normal emotional changes.

Research by Machmud (2013) confirms that low social skills in children correlate with an increased tendency towards deviant behavior, feelings of not being accepted, and social anxiety. When children fail to establish positive social interactions, they not only lose the opportunity to develop, but also risk serious psychological disorders. The implications of poor social skills are not only short-term, but can also have significant long-term consequences. Children who do not receive appropriate interventions to improve their social skills are likely to carry these difficulties into adolescence and adulthood. They may struggle to find employment, build romantic relationships and cope with the increasingly complex real-world social life. Low social skills can also create a negative cycle in an

individual's life. Children who experience failures in social interactions will tend to withdraw, lose self-confidence, experience emotional distress, and ultimately find it more difficult to build the necessary social skills. Without adequate support from the family, school and community environment, the child will continue to be trapped in a cycle of social isolation that hinders their overall development.

Given the impact of low social skills, it is imperative to intervene early. These interventions are not only the responsibility of parents, but also require active roles from educational institutions, communities and policy makers. Social skills training programs in schools, outreach to parents and extracurricular activities that support positive social interactions should be part of a comprehensive strategy to prevent these negative impacts. It is also important for schools to adopt an inclusive and social-emotional approach in their curriculum. Character education, moral education and collaboration-based activities can be effective platforms in developing children's social skills. Teachers also need to be trained to recognize the signs of children experiencing social difficulties, and be given space to assist them personally.

### **The Generation Z Social Ethics Phenomenon as a Reflection of Social Development Failure**

Generation Z, which includes individuals born around 1997 to 2012, is a generational group that grew up in the era of digital, instant information, and globalization of values. Different from previous generations, they have characteristics that are strongly influenced by technology, popular culture, and fast-changing social dynamics. In various public forums, academic discussions, and social media, there has been criticism of Generation Z, which is considered to have a crisis in social ethics, manners, and etiquette. They are often labeled as a generation that is disrespectful, does not respect social hierarchy, tends to be individualistic, and has weak social sensitivity.

This phenomenon is not just a generational stereotype, but reflects a more fundamental problem in the social development process experienced by this group. The lack of social ethics shown by some members of Generation Z can be seen as a reflection of the failure of the process of forming social skills from an early age, whether in the family, school or community environment. To understand this comprehensively, it is necessary to conduct a thorough analysis from the perspective of generational comparison, child development theory, and the influence of media and technology. When compared to previous generations, such as Generation X (born around 1965-1980) and Generation Y or Millennials (born around 1981-1996), Generation Z shows considerable differences in terms of social norms and interpersonal interactions. Twenge (2017) in her study found that Generation Z is more digitally connected than previous generations, but lacks strong in-person social skills, leading to a decline in face-to-face interactions and interpersonal communication skills. Prensky (2001) stated that Generation Z are digital natives, which means they are more accustomed to technology-based communication compared to in-person communication, thus affecting the way they build social relationships and

understand social norms. Furthermore, Seemiller & Grace (2016) explain that Generation Z tends to be more individualistic and independent compared to Generations X and Y who prioritize the value of cooperation and direct interaction. Meanwhile, Palfrey & Gasser (2008) highlighted that Generation Z has skills in utilizing digital technology, but often lacks in understanding the nuances of verbal and non-verbal communication in social interactions. Robinson & Smith (2020) also found that although Generation Z has extensive access to information and global social networks, they are more prone to social anxiety and lack of empathy in interpersonal relationships than previous generations. Thus, changes in interaction patterns and social norms in previous generations tend to grow up in an environment that emphasizes the values of collectivity, politeness, respect for parents and teachers, and active involvement in community life. Things like greetings, the use of polite language, and manners of speaking and acting were an integral part of everyday social education, both at home and at school. Generation Z, on the other hand, has grown up in an era that is more open, free and without geographical or social boundaries. Social media gives them the space to express themselves unfiltered and without direct adult control. This has resulted in the emergence of informal communication patterns, the use of crude or unstandardized language, and defiance of authority as a form of freedom of thought. While Generation Z has some strengths, such as openness, speed of thought, and multitasking ability, they also often have difficulty in understanding conventional social etiquette.

This change in lifestyle and values between generations creates a sharp perception gap. Older generations tend to perceive Generation Z as “brash” or “not knowing their manners”, while Generation Z feels that old social norms are no longer relevant to their fast-paced and flexible lives. In this context, what needs to be highlighted is not only the difference in values, but also the gap in the formation of basic social skills that should be instilled early on. To understand this phenomenon theoretically, several approaches in developmental psychology can be used. One of the most relevant is Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. In the developmental stage of primary school-age children (industry vs inferiority stage), children begin to build self-confidence through social experiences, including cooperation, competition and social interaction. If children do not receive adequate support and training in these interactions at this stage, they will grow into individuals who feel inadequate in social contexts. Entering adolescence (identity stage vs identity confusion), individuals begin to search for their identity and form their personal values. If there is no clear value guidance from family, school, and society, then adolescents will adopt values sourced from the external environment that may not be appropriate, such as popular media culture that often presents hedonistic, violent, and conflictual behavior as normal. In the context of Generation Z, many of them form their social identity more through media content and digital communities than real social experiences colored by direct guidance from parents or teachers.

In addition to Dr. Erikson's theory, Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development also provides important insights. Kohlberg suggested that children's moral

development progresses through three levels: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. Many Generation Z children do not seem to have reached the full conventional stage, where social norms are the main guide to action. Instead, they tend to act based on self-interest, popularity on social media, or external recognition, reflecting the dominance of moral thinking in the pre-conventional stage. In this case, it can be concluded that the failure in the formation of social and moral skills from an early age, whether due to the lack of parental attention, the weak character education system in schools, or the dominance of the media in the process of socializing children, has contributed to the emergence of an ethical crisis in most of Generation Z.

The digital age has brought about major changes in the way individuals, especially children and adolescents, socialize. Digital technology, especially social media, has become the main space for Generation Z to express themselves, form their identity, and build social relationships. However, digital media also has a dark side that impacts children's social development, especially if not accompanied by adequate mentoring and learning of social skills. Exposure to violent content, hate speech, instant lifestyles and viral culture has shaped ways of thinking and acting that are far from traditional norms of decency. Social media algorithms tend to reinforce sensational and extreme behavior, so children and adolescents learn that the most effective way to get attention is to overreact or challenge norms. In this case, social skills that should be interpersonal, empathy-based, and cooperation-oriented, are instead displaced by individualistic, aggressive, and often demeaning communication patterns.

The lack of social skills training from an early age further exacerbates this condition. Many Generation Z children grow up in busy family environments, where parents focus more on work or leave their children's education to schools or gadgets. As a result, children do not get enough experience in playing, discussing or resolving social conflicts directly. The lack of real social interaction causes skills such as active listening, responding with empathy, and regulating emotions to be poorly honed.

Schools, which are supposed to be a means of social training, are also not fully able to fulfill this function. The education curriculum in many places still focuses on the academic aspect and neglects character education and social skills development systematically. Learning activities that are oriented towards memorization and exams often ignore the importance of group work, social simulation, or dialogue as a medium for social learning. Furthermore, modern parenting trends that tend to be permissive also contribute to low social skills. Parenting that is too lax, lacks rules, or focuses too much on children's freedom without value guidance causes children to grow up without clear boundaries on what is and is not allowed in social interactions. They tend to feel free to express anything without considering its impact on others, and perceive criticism as a form of personal attack rather than constructive social input.

The phenomenon of social ethics crisis in Generation Z is not their fault alone, but the result of a social development ecosystem that is not running optimally. Lack of early social skills formation, weak role models from the environment, and the dominance of

uncontrolled digital media have created a generation that is technologically savvy, but often stutters in interacting ethically and empathetically. As a reflection, there needs to be a serious effort from all parties to rebuild a strong social learning system for the younger generation. At the family level, parents must increase their involvement in their children's social life, become role models in ethical behavior, and actively assist their children in using technology. Schools need to design curricula that balance academic and social-emotional aspects, and provide spaces for students to learn to resolve conflicts, discuss and work together. The media should also play a role as an educative agent, not just a purveyor of uneducative entertainment.

In other words, the Generation Z social ethics phenomenon is a reflection of a collective failure to provide a socially healthy growing space. However, it is also an opportunity for us to re-evaluate the existing education and parenting system, and design strategies that are more responsive to the social needs of the younger generation in the digital age. Only in this way can we hope to create a generation that is not only technologically proficient, but also socially intelligent and ethical in real life.

### **Strategies for Strengthening Children's Social Skills**

Improving children's social skills is a collective task that involves various elements in their lives, ranging from family, school, to society. Bronfenbrenner (1979) in his ecological theory of development states that children's development is influenced by various interacting social systems, including the family environment (microsystem), school and community (mesosystem), and broader social policies (macrosystem). This suggests that children's social skills cannot develop optimally if they only rely on one factor, but require support from various parties. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the importance of social interaction in children's learning. He argues that children learn social skills through the process of scaffolding, which is support provided by parents, teachers or more competent individuals to help them understand social norms and rules. Therefore, the active involvement of families and schools in guiding children is necessary so that they can develop healthy social skills. Goleman (1995) in the concept of emotional intelligence asserts that social skills are not only influenced by cognitive factors, but also by a supportive emotional environment. Children who grow up in an environment that provides positive interaction experiences with parents, teachers, and peers will be better able to develop good communication, empathy, and emotion regulation skills. Elias et al. (1997) also added that social-emotional education in schools plays an important role in shaping children's social skills. Programs that focus on social and emotional learning (SEL) have been shown to improve children's ability to interact with peers, resolve conflicts well, and show a more cooperative attitude in social settings. Social skills are not just naturally formed, but are the result of a long and continuous learning process. Given the serious impact of poor social skills on children's emotional development, academics and interpersonal relationships, strategies to strengthen social skills are a necessity that cannot be delayed. These strategies need to be comprehensive, integrated and adaptive

to the context of child development in the digital era. In this section, we will discuss in depth the three main pillars of strengthening children's social skills, namely: the role of family, school and community; social skills intervention and training models; and strengthening character education as a foundation for building social values.

The family is the first and most influential environment in the formation of children's social skills. Baumrind (1967) in his study on parenting emphasized that parents' interactions with children determine how children learn to communicate, understand social norms, and develop adaptive social skills. Authoritative parenting, characterized by a combination of warmth and firm nurturing, has been shown to produce children who are more confident, cooperative and have better social skills. Parke & Buriel (2006) also stated that the family is the first social arena for children to learn interpersonal skills, manage emotions, and understand social norms that apply in society. They emphasize that parents who actively interact with children through conversations, games, and other family activities will help children develop stronger social competencies, compared to children who grow up in a family environment with minimal communication and parental involvement.

From infancy, children begin to learn to understand the facial expressions, voices and body language of those closest to them. These early interactions lay the foundation for children to recognize emotions, mimic social behavior, and build trust in the environment. Parents have a major role as social models. Children learn through observation of their parents' behavior in resolving conflicts, communicating, expressing emotions, and treating others. Therefore, parents need to model positive social behaviors, such as listening with empathy, respecting opinions, apologizing, or giving praise. Parenting also plays a big role. Authoritative parenting, which is firm but warm, has been found to be the most effective in supporting children's social-emotional development. It allows children to explore their social environment with a sense of security, while still being guided with clear values and boundaries. In contrast, authoritarian (harsh and inflexible) or permissive (too lenient) parenting can lead to confusion of social values and deviant behavior. Family support in the form of active involvement in children's activities is also important. Through involvement in school activities, daily conversations, shared meals or religious activities, children learn prevailing social norms and strengthen their social skills.

School is not only an academic educational institution, but also an important space for children to interact, negotiate, resolve conflicts, and build social identity. Pianta, Hamre, & Stuhlman (2003) emphasized that the school environment acts as a social ecosystem that allows children to learn social skills through interactions with peers and teachers. They found that positive relationships between teachers and students can improve children's social competence and help them develop strategies in resolving conflicts constructively. Wentzel (1991) states that children's academic and social success is strongly related to the quality of their relationships at school. Children who feel accepted and have social support from the school environment tend to be more able to adjust

socially, show prosocial behavior, and have better self-control in dealing with social pressure and interpersonal conflicts. Teachers act as facilitators of children's social development, both directly through learning and indirectly through daily interactions. Social education can be included in various subjects, co-curricular activities and extracurricular programs. For example, language and Civics lessons can be used to train the ability to express opinions, listen, and discuss. The Child Friendly School (SRA) program promoted by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection is an example of an initiative that integrates social-emotional learning in the school environment. Through this approach, schools are encouraged to create a culture that is inclusive, free from violence, and supports children's mental and social health. It is also important for schools to have a clear and educational anti-bullying policy. Children need to be taught how to deal with conflict peacefully, how to ask for help, and how to be a good helper for a friend in trouble.

The community has a strategic role in expanding children's social learning space beyond the home and school environment. Lave & Wenger (1991) in their situated learning theory assert that social learning occurs in the context of the community through direct interaction and real experiences. They emphasized that children who are active in the social life of the community, such as through group activities, youth organizations, or cultural activities, will more quickly develop social skills because they learn directly from an authentic environment. In addition, Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls (1997) in their research on collective social control stated that a strong and supportive social environment can prevent deviant behavior and improve children's social skills. Children who grow up in communities with healthy social interactions tend to have more empathy, social responsibility, and good communication skills than children who lack social engagement in their environment. A safe, tolerant and inclusive environment will enrich children's social experiences. Children's participation in community activities such as gotong royong, recitation, sports, or cultural activities will help them build a sense of belonging to their environment. Religious institutions, youth organizations and other social institutions can also be important partners in children's social education. Through approaches that are in line with local and cultural values, communities can shape children into caring, responsible individuals who actively contribute to their communities.

Social skills training can be provided through various methods and approaches that have been tested for effectiveness. One of the most widely used approaches is Social Skills Training (SST), which is training designed to help individuals understand, practice and internalize basic social skills.

The SST model generally involves several stages:

1. Identify the child's social needs - Determine which aspects of social skills are weak, such as empathy, self-control, cooperation skills, or assertiveness.
2. Explicit learning - Providing explanations of specific social skills, such as how to greet others, how to ask for help politely, or how to decline inappropriate invitations.

3. Role play - The child is given the opportunity to practice the skill in a simulated social situation.
4. Feedback - The child gets feedback on the strengths and areas for improvement of their behavior.
5. Reinforcement and generalization - The child is encouraged to apply the skills in everyday life and given positive reinforcement if they succeed in doing so.

In addition to SST, behavior modification approaches can also be used, especially for children who have behavioral disorders or special needs. Research by Subardhini, Sofiani, and Hasbi (2025) proved that behavior modification-based social skills training can be applied even to People with Mental Disorders (ODGJ), with significant results in shaping worship behavior and resistance to negative influences. Group-based interventions are also effective in training social skills, as they allow children to learn from others, see real examples, and experience group dynamics. This model can be developed in the context of group guidance in schools or through extracurricular programs such as theater, debate, team sports or leadership activities.

For early childhood, play-based interventions are particularly effective. Through social play, children learn to take turns, share, wait and cooperate, all of which are important components of social skills. Character education is an approach that emphasizes the formation of strong moral, ethical and personality values as the basis for social behavior.

Values such as empathy, honesty, responsibility, tolerance and mutual cooperation are part of the character that underlies good social skills. Strengthening character education can be done through the integration of values in the curriculum, habituation in school life, and exemplary behavior from teachers and other adults. Character education is not only teaching what is right and wrong, but also developing moral awareness and internal motivation to do the right thing in social situations. One strategy that can be applied is value-based learning, which is learning that links each academic material with certain social values. For example, in a science lesson about water, the teacher can relate the importance of clean water to the social responsibility of protecting the environment. Social-emotional learning (SEL) is also an important approach in character education. Through SEL, children are taught to recognize emotions, manage stress, make responsible decisions and build healthy relationships. SEL is proven to increase children's emotional well-being and improve their relationships with friends, teachers and family. Strengthening character education can also be done through positive narratives, such as folktales, stories of inspirational figures, and educational films that show social values in real life. These narratives help children understand social concepts contextually and touch their affective aspects.

In order for the strategy to strengthen children's social skills to be successful, synergy between various parties is needed: families, schools, communities, government agencies and the media. The government can play a role through policies that support social-emotional education, teacher training in positive parenting, and the provision of



child counseling programs in schools. Media institutions also have a social responsibility to provide content that is educational, inspiring and contains constructive social values. Healthy media can be an educational partner, not just entertainment. Non-formal institutions such as children's creativity centers, youth communities, and children's forums can also play a role in providing safe and positive spaces for children to grow and learn to socialize healthily.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This review highlights the importance of social skills as a fundamental aspect of child development. Based on the various studies discussed, children's social skills - including empathy, participation and assertiveness - are still in the moderate category and require continuous strengthening. Low social skills not only result in difficulties in establishing interpersonal relationships, but also contribute to various emotional, academic, and social risk problems such as aggressiveness, isolation, and depression. The phenomenon of social ethics crisis seen in most of Generation Z can also be understood as a reflection of the failure in shaping social skills from an early age. The formation of social skills needs to be done systematically and starts when children are in the family environment. Parents act as the main role models in shaping children's social behavior. Schools, as formal education institutions, need to design learning that is balanced between academic and social-emotional aspects, and provide a healthy interaction space. Society, media and public policy must also play an active role in creating a conducive social ecosystem. Synergy between families, educators and communities is needed to build a strong foundation of social skills for children. In addition, strengthening character education and social skills training need to be integrated in the curriculum and daily educational practices. As a recommendation, further research is needed to explore the most effective intervention models in developing children's social skills across different cultural and social backgrounds. The government and educational institutions are also expected to design policies that support the development of social skills in a directed, sustainable and contextualized manner in accordance with the challenges of the times.

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