

Implications of Generation Alpha's Digital Language Style on WhatsApp for Social Communication: A Case Study of Third-Grade Students at SDIT AI- Mukmin Kelapa Gading

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ABSTRACT

The rapid evolution of digital technology has reshaped communication practices across all generations, with Generation Alpha representing the first cohort fully immersed in digital environments since birth. This study explores the forms of digital language style used by Generation Alpha on WhatsApp and examines its implications for social communication skills. Using a qualitative descriptive method with a case study approach, the research focuses on third-grade students at SDIT AI-Mukmin Kelapa Gading. Data were collected from WhatsApp chat screenshots, emoji usage patterns, abbreviations, and code-mixed expressions. Findings reveal that students rely heavily on linguistic shortcuts, visual symbols, English-Indonesian code-mixing, and emotional exaggeration through repeated characters and emojis. These digital linguistic forms significantly influence their social interaction tendencies. While digital communication enhances expressiveness, creativity, and peer bonding, it also reduces children's sensitivity to formal language norms and weakens face-to-face empathy. This study highlights the need for balanced digital literacy education to ensure healthy linguistic and social development.

Keywords: *Generation Alpha, Digital Language Style, WhatsApp, Social Communication, Linguistic Behavior, Digital Literacy.*

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1. Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital technology over the last two decades has fundamentally transformed how humans communicate, interact, and construct meaning.

This transformation is especially evident among younger generations who have been exposed to digital devices and online platforms from early childhood. Among them, Generation Alpha children born from 2010 onward stands out as the first generation to experience full digital immersion from infancy. Unlike earlier generations who transitioned into digital culture gradually, Generation Alpha is considered “*born digital*”, navigating touchscreen interfaces, algorithm-driven content, and multimodal communication as part of their everyday lived experience (Prensky, 2001; McCrindle, 2020; Yaumi et al., 2024; Jung et al., 2025).

In Indonesia, digital technology plays an increasingly central role in the daily activities of children. The widespread accessibility of smartphones, combined with parental reliance on digital platforms for education and communication, has resulted in a significant rise in online interactions among young learners. WhatsApp, despite its age restrictions, is widely used by elementary school students as a medium for coordinating homework, sharing information, and engaging in informal peer communication. The use of WhatsApp group chats among students at SDIT Al-Mukmin Kelapa Gading illustrates this phenomenon vividly, providing researchers with firsthand insight into digital linguistic practices of children aged 8–9 years old.

This shift in communication environments raises important questions about how digital platforms influence linguistic development and social behavior. Language acquisition during childhood is shaped by the interaction of cognitive processes, social environments, and cultural experiences. When communication increasingly takes place in virtual spaces, linguistic norms and social conventions inevitably adjust. Digital communication tends to prioritize speed, efficiency, expressiveness, and visual cues, resulting in the rise of abbreviations, code-mixed expressions, emojis, stickers, GIFs, and non-standard orthographic styles.

Furthermore, the communicative norms within digital spaces differ significantly from those in formal educational institutions especially in Islamic integrated schools like SDIT Al-Mukmin Kelapa Gading, where politeness, clarity, and linguistic discipline are emphasized as part of character formation. This tension between formal language expectations and informal digital practices becomes particularly relevant when examining how children navigate multiple linguistic registers according to context.

The social implications of digital language practices warrant deeper analysis. While digital communication enhances children's expressiveness, creativity, and peer bonding, it may also pose challenges such as reduced formal literacy, limited vocabulary development, weakened interpersonal empathy, and increased reliance on symbols rather than verbal articulation. The ability to interpret tone, emotion, and intention in face-to-face interaction may be compromised when children primarily engage in symbolic communication rather than spoken dialogue.

Given these considerations, this study seeks to explore the forms of digital language style used by Generation Alpha students on WhatsApp, identify the

sociolinguistic and technological factors shaping these patterns, and analyze the implications for social communication both within and beyond digital spaces. By focusing on a case study of SDIT Al-Mukmin Kelapa Gading an institution known for its character-based education this research provides meaningful insights into the interplay between digital communication and the cultivation of linguistic etiquette in primary school contexts.

Ultimately, this research is motivated by the need to better understand how digital environments influence the linguistic and social development of children and how educators and parents can foster balanced communication skills that integrate both digital fluency and real-world interpersonal competence. This study aims to inform educational policy, digital literacy initiatives, and pedagogical strategies that support children in navigating the complexities of communication in the digital age.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Previous Studies

Research on digital communication, children's linguistic development, and Generation Alpha has expanded significantly over the past decade. However, most studies focus on adolescents or adults, leaving a gap in research on younger elementary-aged children particularly those within Islamic educational environments. This section reviews key previous studies relevant to the current research, categorized into global studies, Indonesian studies, and thematic studies on emojis, code-mixing, and digital literacy.

2.1.1 Digital Communication in Early Childhood

The rapid diffusion of digital media has shifted communication practices across all age groups, including young children. Digital communication, as described by Crystal (2004), introduces new linguistic conventions shaped by the affordances of technology speed, multimodality, and interactivity. For children, these digital interactions often become their earliest exposure to written language, particularly through chatting applications such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and Messenger Kids.

Research conducted in Indonesia and globally emphasizes how digital platforms have altered children's linguistic environments. Asmara (2022) found that elementary school students frequently use digital shorthand, emojis, and abbreviated forms when interacting online. These patterns emerge as children mirror the communication styles they observe in older peers, siblings, or online influencers. Similarly, Pratiwi (2023) reported that continuous exposure to WhatsApp communication results in children preferring non-standard sentence structures and minimalistic linguistic expressions.

Studies in other contexts also show similar trends. Tagliamonte and Denis (2008) found that youth digital communication is dominated by acronymic language, emoticons, and non-standard orthography. Such linguistic features are often perceived as markers

of social identity and digital fluency. Plester and Wood (2009) argue that digital texting behaviors may enhance creativity and metalinguistic awareness, although they caution that excessive reliance may have negative effects on formal writing.

2.1.2 Generation Alpha and Digital Linguistic Practices

Generation Alpha is widely characterized as the most technologically immersed generation in history, having grown up with digital devices from infancy (McCrindle, 2020). This generation acquires digital literacy simultaneously with spoken and written language development, leading to a highly integrated communication style that seamlessly blends textual, visual, and interactive elements. Recent studies demonstrate that Generation Alpha tends to prefer fast-paced, visually rich, and emotionally expressive forms of communication, such as emojis, stickers, voice notes, and short text bursts (Iswatiningsih et al., 2024; Said et al., 2021; Weda & Rahman, 2019). Their linguistic patterns are shaped by multiple sociocultural and cognitive factors. Exposure to globalized digital culture particularly YouTube, TikTok, and online games introduces hybrid linguistic expressions that combine Indonesian with English, creating a fluid code-mixed repertoire (Weda et al., 2021; Sachiya et al., 2025; Salsabila et al., 2025). At the same time, digital slang and visual symbols serve as tools for peer identity formation, helping children affiliate with their social groups. Cognitive factors also play a role, as simplified linguistic forms reduce mental and typing effort, enabling children to respond quickly and efficiently (Adinda et al., 2025; Sosrohadi & Wulandari, 2022). Moreover, platform affordances such as predictive text, typing shortcuts, and readily accessible emoji panels further encourage brevity and multimodal expression.

2.1.3 Digital Symbols and Social Communication

Beyond textual features, children's digital communication relies heavily on symbolic visual cues. Emojis, GIFs, and stickers function as expressive semiotic tools that approximate facial expressions, tone, and emotional nuance, enabling children to enrich or even replace verbal content. Danesi (2016) describes emojis as a form of "visual paralanguage," suggesting that they serve communicative functions similar to gestures in face-to-face interaction. While such symbols enhance clarity by making emotional intent more explicit thereby reducing the risk of misinterpretation (Derks et al., 2007) they also raise developmental concerns. Research by Hills (2020) indicates that overreliance on emojis may inhibit children's ability to articulate emotions verbally or recognize subtle emotional cues in real-world interactions. Thus, the impact of emojis appears to be double-edged: they increase expressiveness in digital environments but may diminish opportunities for linguistic and emotional development in offline contexts.

2.1.4 Gaps in Existing Literature

Although research on digital communication has grown substantially, significant gaps remain. Most prior studies focus on adolescents, leaving younger children particularly ages 8 to 9 underrepresented in empirical research. There is also limited scholarly attention on Islamic-integrated school environments, where norms of

politeness, discipline, and moral communication are strongly emphasized. Existing literature tends to analyze digital technology more broadly, with few studies examining WhatsApp-specific linguistic behaviors among younger learners. Moreover, while many studies describe digital linguistic features, fewer investigate the broader social implications of digital communication, such as its influence on empathy, politeness, peer relationships, or emotional expression. This study seeks to address these gaps through an in-depth case analysis of Generation Alpha's digital language practices within a structured Islamic educational context.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

To analyze both the linguistic and social dimensions of Generation Alpha's WhatsApp communication, this study employs four major theoretical perspectives: Keraf's Language Style Theory, Miller's Digital Communication Theory, Sociolinguistic Theory, and Pragmatic Theory.

2.2.1 Keraf's Language Style Theory (2006)

Gorys Keraf's theory categorizes language style into literal, figurative, structural, and grammatical types (2006). This framework is highly relevant to digital language because children's WhatsApp messages frequently display classical stylistic features in modified digital forms. Ellipsis occurs when students omit grammatical elements, producing short messages such as "*main gak?*" or "*udah makan?*" Repetition is used to intensify emotion or enthusiasm, as in "*asyiiiikkkkk*" or "*iyaaaaa*." Hyperbole also appears in exaggerated expressions such as "*capek banget kaya mau pingsan*," while metaphor emerges in humorous self-descriptions like "*aku zombie gara-gara PR*." Keraf's classifications help illuminate how traditional styles are transformed within digital environments and repurposed for expressive, playful, and socially meaningful communication.

2.2.2 Miller's Digital Communication Theory (2005)

Katherine Miller (2005) conceptualizes communication as a process of constructing shared meaning through symbolic exchanges. In digital contexts, these symbols extend beyond words to include emojis, GIFs, stickers, voice notes, and interface-generated indicators such as blue ticks or typing notifications. WhatsApp emerges as a multimodal communicative space where meaning is co-constructed through visual, textual, and contextual elements. Because digital interaction lacks facial expressions, tone, and body language, users especially children compensate by employing visual symbols. This results in increased emoji usage, simplified syntax, reliance on tone indicators (e.g., repeated letters), and frequent substitution of words with symbols. Miller's theory thus provides a crucial lens for analyzing how children generate meaning through multimodal digital resources.

2.2.3 Sociolinguistic Theory

Sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistics that examines the relationship between language and social context, emphasizing that language use is influenced by social factors such as groups, institutions, and cultural norms rather than solely by individual choice (Labov, 1972). In the context of Generation Alpha, digital communication practices develop within environments strongly shaped by peer identity formation, group norms, and exposure to multilingual interactions in digital spaces. Participation in digital communities encourages individuals to adjust their language use to align with shared practices and group expectations (Wenger, 1998).

On communication platforms such as WhatsApp, children adapt their linguistic styles as a form of linguistic accommodation toward peers, both to build social closeness and to maintain group membership (Giles, 1973). In this process, language is used to negotiate solidarity, humor, politeness, and social hierarchy. The linguistic strategies employed reflect efforts to maintain interactional harmony and manage social face in communication (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Furthermore, digital communication gives rise to distinctive linguistic norms that are socially negotiated among users. Consequently, language use in digital media should not be understood as deviation, but rather as a contextually situated linguistic variation (Herring, 2004). Children's linguistic practices in digital spaces are also shaped by processes of language socialization, in which values derived from family, school, and religious environments influence their understanding of appropriate and respectful language use (Ochs & Schieffelin, 1984). Thus, children's digital language use reflects an ongoing effort to balance informal expressions characteristic of digital media with communicative standards valued within the broader social environment.

2.2.4 Pragmatic Theory

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that examines meaning in relation to context of use, focusing on how utterances are interpreted not only through their linguistic structure but also through situational factors, speaker intentions, social relationships, and shared knowledge between speakers and hearers. Accordingly, pragmatics emphasizes that meaning is not fixed, but is constructed through social interaction (Yule, 1996).

One of the foundational frameworks in pragmatics is Speech Act Theory, introduced by J. L. Austin and further developed by John Searle. This theory posits that language is not used solely to convey information, but also to perform social actions, such as requesting, refusing, joking, or asserting identity. In the context of digital communication, short messages, emojis, or specific expressions can function as pragmatic acts that represent speakers' attitudes, emotions, or communicative intentions.

Pragmatics also encompasses the Cooperative Principle, proposed by H. P. Grice. This principle explains that speakers and hearers implicitly cooperate to ensure effective communication through adherence to four conversational maxims: quantity, quality, relevance, and manner. In digital communication, particularly within WhatsApp groups, adherence to or deliberate violation of these maxims is often employed strategically to create humor, irony, or social closeness.

Another important aspect of pragmatics is Politeness Theory, developed by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson. This theory explains how speakers manage the concept of *face* (social self-image) in interaction through positive and negative politeness strategies. In children's digital communication, these strategies are evident in word choice, the use of emojis, abbreviations, or indirect language forms intended to maintain social relationships and avoid conflict.

In the context of Generation Alpha and digitally mediated communication, pragmatic theory provides a crucial framework for understanding how children strategically use language to negotiate meaning, social relationships, politeness, and identity in interactions that do not always occur face-to-face. Therefore, pragmatics is highly relevant for analyzing linguistic practices in digital interactions, including conversations within WhatsApp groups.

2.2.5 Conceptual Model of the Study

This study proposes a conceptual model grounded in sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and digital communication theories to explain children's language use in digitally mediated environments. From a sociolinguistic perspective, language use is understood as a socially situated practice shaped by broader social contexts rather than individual choice alone (William Labov, 1972). In contemporary digital settings, particularly among Generation Alpha, communication practices develop within environments characterized by peer interaction, group norms, and exposure to multilingual resources.

Drawing on digital sociolinguistics and computer-mediated communication studies, the model conceptualizes the digital environment as a key contextual factor that shapes children's linguistic features, such as abbreviations, emojis, and code-mixing (Susan Herring, 2004; Naomi Baron, 2008). These linguistic features emerge not only from technological affordances of digital platforms but also from socially negotiated norms within online communities. Participation in digital communities encourages users to align their language use with shared practices and expectations, consistent with the concept of communities of practice (Etienne Wenger, 1998).

Within the proposed model, children's linguistic features serve as mediating mechanisms through which the digital environment influences social communication practices. From a pragmatic perspective, linguistic choices function as social actions that convey meaning beyond literal content (J. L. Austin, 1962; John Searle, 1969). The use of abbreviations, emojis, and mixed-language expressions can thus be interpreted as

pragmatic strategies for expressing empathy, managing politeness, and conveying emotional stance in interaction.

Furthermore, pragmatic interaction is guided by cooperative principles and politeness strategies that regulate effective and socially appropriate communication (H. P. Grice, 1975; Penelope Brown & Stephen Levinson, 1987). In digital interactions, particularly in group-based platforms such as WhatsApp, children strategically adhere to or deviate from these principles to negotiate solidarity, humor, hierarchy, and emotional expression. As a result, linguistic patterns cannot be analyzed in isolation but must be situated within broader social and technological contexts.

The model also emphasizes a reciprocal relationship between digital linguistic behavior and children's socio-emotional development. Developmental and language socialization theories suggest that language both reflects and shapes children's social and emotional competencies (Lev Vygotsky, 1978; Elinor Ochs & Bambi Schieffelin, 1984). While children's socio-emotional capacities influence how they communicate in digital spaces, repeated engagement in digitally mediated interaction also contributes to the development of empathy, emotional awareness, and social sensitivity.

Overall, the proposed conceptual model provides an analytical framework that situates children's digital language practices at the intersection of linguistic form, social interaction, and technological context. By highlighting the dynamic and reciprocal relationship between digital linguistic features and socio-emotional development, the model guides the empirical analysis of how children use language to construct meaning, manage relationships, and navigate social life in digital environments.

3. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design aimed at exploring the natural linguistic patterns exhibited by Generation Alpha students in their WhatsApp communication. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for a detailed understanding of authentic language use, contextual meanings, and symbolic expressions that emerge in real interactions, aspects that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods. To gain an in-depth perspective, the research adopted a case study approach, which, according to Yin (2018), is appropriate for examining contemporary phenomena embedded within their real-life contexts. WhatsApp communication among third-grade students represents such a case, as their digital linguistic behavior is inseparable from their social environment, peer dynamics, and school culture.

The study was conducted at SDIT Al-Mukmin Kelapa Gading, a private Islamic-integrated elementary school in North Jakarta known for its emphasis on character development, Islamic values, and polite communication. This setting offers a meaningful context in which to investigate how children navigate the contrasting linguistic expectations between formal school norms and their informal, playful digital

communication with peers. Participants consisted of 20 third-grade students, aged 8 to 9 years old, selected using purposive sampling based on their active participation in the WhatsApp group. Ethical considerations were strictly maintained, including obtaining parental consent, anonymizing all student data, and ensuring confidentiality in the handling of screenshots and observational notes.

Data for this study were derived from three primary sources: WhatsApp chat screenshots, observational notes, and informal insights from teachers and parents. WhatsApp screenshots were the main source of linguistic data, capturing text messages, abbreviations, emojis, stickers, and other symbolic expressions used by students. Over a six-week period, screenshots were collected daily to ensure the capture of a wide range of communication situations, including casual interactions, playful exchanges, and discussions related to school assignments. Observational notes were taken to document students' communication behaviors during classroom and playground interactions, enabling the researcher to compare their digital language use with face-to-face language practices. Meanwhile, informal conversations with teachers and parents provided contextual information about students' digital habits, levels of device exposure, and general communication tendencies.

Data collection followed a structured process beginning with the identification of active WhatsApp groups and obtaining access permission from school authorities and parents. The researcher then systematically collected screenshots containing distinctive linguistic and symbolic features such as abbreviations, repeated characters, ellipsis, emoji sequences, and code-mixed expressions. These screenshots were compiled, chronologically ordered, and categorized according to emerging linguistic themes. Simultaneously, school-based observations were conducted to understand the broader communicative environment in which students operated, helping to contextualize their digital behaviors.

Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data reduction, irrelevant chats such as forwarded messages or administrative announcements were removed, while salient excerpts demonstrating linguistic creativity or stylistic features were coded. The coded data were then organized into analytical categories, including types of abbreviations, emoji usage patterns, code-mixing instances, syntactic reductions, and expressive intensifiers. Organizing the data visually in matrices and tables enabled clearer identification of linguistic patterns and thematic relationships. In the concluding stage, the researcher interpreted the findings using sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and stylistic frameworks, drawing connections between the students' linguistic choices and their social, technological, and educational contexts. To enhance credibility, interpretations were validated through repeated reading of the data and cross-checking with additional screenshots and observational findings.

Throughout the research process, strict ethical principles were upheld. Students' identities were anonymized, and no sensitive personal information was included in the

analysis. Only natural data produced by the students during regular interactions were used, and the researcher ensured that the presence of adults in the group did not influence or manipulate the communication captured. Despite these measures, the study acknowledges several methodological limitations. WhatsApp communication in supervised groups may not fully reflect students' unrestricted linguistic practices, and the findings are limited to a specific school context, thus not fully generalizable to all Indonesian elementary school students. Nonetheless, the method used provides rich, authentic, and contextually grounded insights into the digital communication patterns of Generation Alpha children.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis of WhatsApp communication among third-grade students at SDIT Al-Mukmin Kelapa Gading reveals a complex and dynamic interplay of linguistic, social, and technological factors that shape Generation Alpha's digital language style. The data collected over a six-week period demonstrate that the children rely heavily on a combination of abbreviated forms, emojis, repeated characters, hybrid language mixing, and simplified syntactic constructions. These linguistic patterns reflect not only the affordances of WhatsApp as a digital platform but also peer influence, exposure to global media, and the natural linguistic tendencies of children who are navigating early literacy within digital environments.

One of the most salient linguistic features observed in the WhatsApp chats is the extensive use of abbreviations and shorthand expressions. Words such as “*gpp*” (nggak apa-apa), “*gk*” (nggak), “*btw*” (by the way), and “*wkwkwk*” (laughter) appear frequently throughout the conversations. These shortcuts serve the function of speed, efficiency, and ease of typing, consistent with Crystal's (2004) argument that digital communication encourages linguistic economy. For children whose motor and spelling skills are still developing, abbreviations reduce the physical and cognitive effort required to compose messages. Moreover, their use signals membership within a shared peer culture where mastery of such expressions marks social belonging. This aligns with Tagliamonte and Denis (2008), who found that adolescents employ abbreviations not merely for efficiency but as identity markers within digital communities.

Another prominent finding is the heavy reliance on emojis and visual symbols, which function as emotional and pragmatic cues. Emojis such as 😂, 🤔, 🙄, 🤩, and 🙄 are used not only to express specific emotions but also to soften requests, indicate sarcasm, or enhance humor. For example, students often append 😂 or 🙄 to ordinary statements to exaggerate emotional tone, demonstrating what Danesi (2016) refers to as “visual paralanguage.” In several cases, emojis replace entire lexical items, such as responding to a question with only 👍 or 🙄, suggesting that emojis serve as complete communicative acts in their own right. This supports Miller's (2005) theory that digital communication constructs meaning not only through text but through multimodal symbolic systems.

The analysis also reveals extensive code-mixing between Indonesian and English, such as “guys ayo main,” “aku so tired banget,” or “wait aku ambil dulu.” These expressions reflect the children’s exposure to English through YouTube, online games, and social media, supporting Setiawan’s (2019) findings that code-mixing among Indonesian youth is driven by global media consumption. Among Generation Alpha, English lexical items often carry prestige or emotional nuance that Indonesian equivalents do not, contributing to their widespread adoption. This hybrid linguistic repertoire demonstrates how global digital culture permeates local communication, even among young children.

Table 1. Summarizes the dominant linguistic features identified in the WhatsApp interactions and outlines their primary communicative functions within peer-based digital communication among third-grade students.

No.	Linguistic Feature	Examples from Data	Primary Communicative Functions
1	Abbreviations and shorthand	<i>gpp, gk, yg, btw, wkwkwk</i>	Increase typing efficiency; reduce cognitive and motor effort; signal in-group membership and peer identity
2	Emojis and visual symbols		Express emotions; clarify pragmatic intent; soften statements; replace non-verbal cues; function as stand-alone responses
3	Repeated characters	<i>iyaa, seruuuu, lamaaa, hahaha</i>	Intensify meaning; convey enthusiasm or emphasis; mimic spoken prosody; express affective stance
4	Code-mixing (Indonesian–English)	<i>guys ayo main, aku so tired banget, wait aku ambil dulu</i>	Index global media exposure; convey prestige or trendiness; add emotional nuance; expand expressive resources

No.	Linguistic Feature	Examples from Data	Primary Communicative Functions
5	Simplified syntactic structures	<i>udah?, nanti ya, aku dulu</i>	Enable rapid communication; rely on shared context; reflect developmental literacy stage and digital norms

Another stylistic feature frequently observed is repetition and exaggerated spelling, such as “asyiiiikkkkk,” “iyaaaaa,” or “mauuuuuuu.” These patterns serve expressive functions, enabling children to convey enthusiasm, insistence, or emotional intensity in ways that mimic prosody in spoken interaction. In Keraf’s (2006) stylistic taxonomy, such repetition falls under expressive intensification and reflects the children’s attempt to compensate for the lack of tonal variation in text.

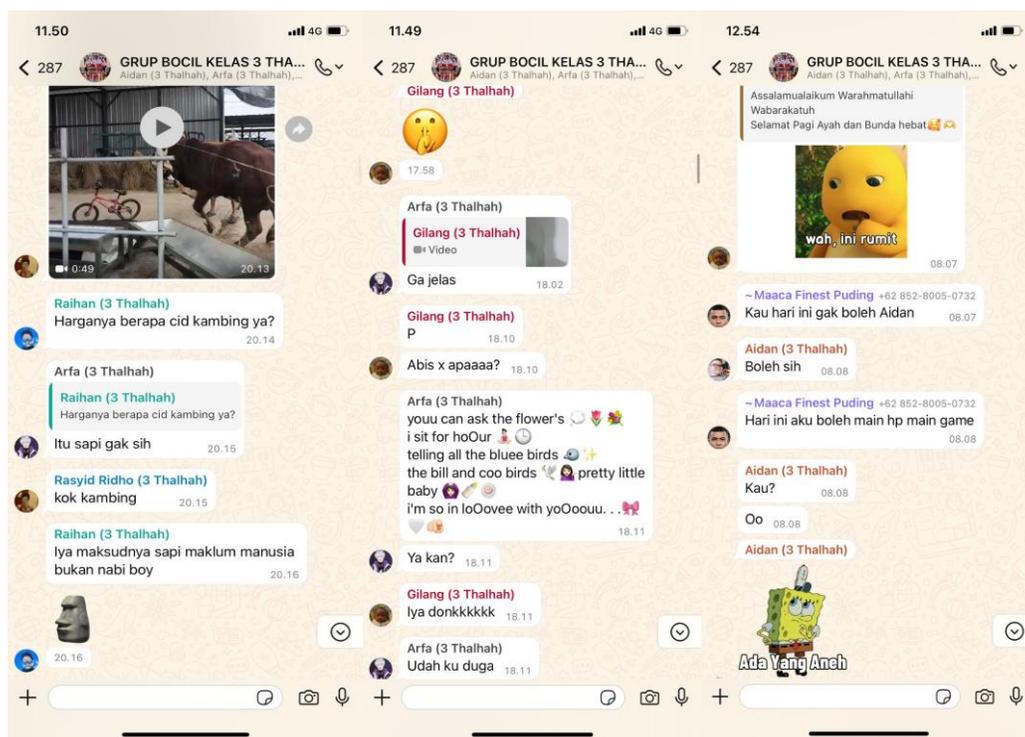


Figure 1. The data from captured WhatsApp communication among third-grade students at SDIT AI-Mukmin Kelapa Gading

These findings are consistent with Plester and Wood’s (2009) view that digital communication encourages the creative and conscious manipulation of orthographic forms. In this context, non-standard spellings do not reflect deficient literacy skills; rather, they function as linguistic resources for expressing emotion, constructing social identity, and strengthening interpersonal closeness.

Syntactically, the data reveal extensive use of ellipsis and minimalistic sentence structures, such as “*main gak?*”, “*lagi di mana?*”, or “*boleh ikut?*” These elliptical constructions omit subjects, auxiliaries, or function words, relying on shared context for interpretation. This finding aligns with Gorys Keraf’s classification of ellipsis as a stylistic device and supports Crystal’s (2004) observation that digital platforms encourage sentence reduction due to time constraints and typing effort. For young children, ellipsis is also developmentally natural as they are still mastering full syntactic structures in both spoken and written language.

In addition to linguistic forms, the analysis uncovered several social patterns embedded within the students’ digital communication. First, the use of digital expressions strengthens peer bonding, as children frequently respond to one another with supportive emojis, playful teasing, or rapid-fire exchanges that reinforce group cohesion. This supports Derks et al. (2007), who assert that digital cues often function as relational tools, helping users maintain social closeness in text-based interactions. Second, informal and playful digital language appears to offer emotional safety for students, as several children use emojis or humorous abbreviations to mitigate embarrassment or soften conflict.

However, the findings also suggest several negative implications for social and linguistic development. The reliance on emojis and abbreviations may reduce opportunities for children to practice expressing emotions verbally or constructing complex sentences. This concern is echoed by Pratiwi (2023), who found that frequent digital communication correlates with weaker performance in formal writing tasks among elementary students. The students in this study occasionally exhibited difficulty transitioning from WhatsApp-style language to classroom writing, evidenced by the use of abbreviations and incomplete sentences in assignments. Furthermore, the lack of tone and facial cues in digital communication sometimes led to misunderstandings, particularly when emojis were interpreted differently by different students, reflecting Hills’ (2020) argument that digital symbols may hinder development of nuanced emotion recognition skills.

Interestingly, the data also reveal tension between digital language norms and school-taught politeness norms. While teachers emphasize respectful and grammatically correct communication, students frequently use playful teasing, simplified forms, or informal English expressions in the WhatsApp group. This suggests that children compartmentalize their linguistic behavior according to context formal in school, informal in digital interactions a phenomenon aligned with broader sociolinguistic code-switching theories.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Generation Alpha’s digital language style on WhatsApp represents a hybrid linguistic system shaped by developmental factors, global media exposure, peer identity formation, and the affordances of digital platforms. These patterns show both linguistic innovation and areas of potential concern for formal language development and social-emotional growth. The discussion reinforces the need

for balanced digital literacy education that fosters both technological fluency and interpersonal communication skills, ensuring that children can navigate both digital and face-to-face communication contexts effectively.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that the digital language style of Generation Alpha students in WhatsApp communication represents a distinctive and evolving linguistic phenomenon shaped by technological, social, and developmental influences. The third-grade students at SDIT Al-Mukmin Kelapa Gading exhibit a dynamic repertoire of digital expressions, including abbreviations, emojis, code-mixed English–Indonesian phrases, repeated characters, ellipsis, and playful orthographic variations. These features demonstrate that even at a young age, children are already navigating complex linguistic environments where written text, visual symbols, and multimedia forms converge to construct meaning. Their digital language use reflects not only efficiency and convenience but also identity-building, emotional expression, and peer bonding.

The study highlights that WhatsApp functions as more than a communication platform; it serves as a social space where children negotiate relationships, express emotions, and build a shared linguistic culture. The frequent use of emojis and exaggerated forms illustrates children's reliance on visual cues to compensate for the lack of intonation and facial expressions in text-based communication. Code-mixing, often influenced by global digital media, demonstrates how English expressions are seamlessly blended with Indonesian to convey modernity, humor, or emphasis. These patterns align with global trends in youth digital communication, suggesting that Indonesian Generation Alpha is participating in a broader linguistic shift influenced by technological globalization.

However, the study also identifies several challenges. The prevalence of abbreviations, emoji-only responses, and simplified sentence constructions raises concerns about the transfer of digital shorthand into formal writing contexts. Children occasionally struggle to distinguish between informal digital language and appropriate written academic language, confirming earlier research that suggests digital communication may influence formal literacy skills. Furthermore, emotional expression through emojis may limit the development of nuanced verbal communication, as children increasingly depend on symbols rather than vocabulary to convey feelings. Misunderstandings within the group also occurred when emojis carried ambiguous meanings, highlighting the need for improved digital emotional literacy.

Another important insight is the tension between the school's emphasis on politeness and the children's informal digital linguistic practices. Although SDIT Al-Mukmin Kelapa Gading promotes respectful communication aligned with Islamic values, children's WhatsApp interactions often reflect relaxed norms, playful teasing, and highly informal structures. This contrast demonstrates that children fluidly shift between linguistic registers, adapting their language to fit the context. Such flexibility is a natural

part of sociolinguistic development but underscores the need for guidance in managing appropriate digital communication behavior.

Overall, this study concludes that the digital communication of Generation Alpha is both innovative and complex. It embodies the linguistic creativity of young learners while also presenting developmental challenges that educators and parents must address. The findings underscore the importance of digital literacy education that balances technological fluency with linguistic awareness, ethical communication, and emotional intelligence. As digital platforms continue to shape children's linguistic environments, schools and families must work together to support healthy language development, ensuring that children are equipped to communicate effectively in both digital and offline contexts.

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