

INTEGRATING HUMANISM THEORY INTO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION POLICY IN THE DIGITAL ERA: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES OF MODERNIZATION IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

This article analyzes the implementation of humanism theory in early childhood education (ECE) policies in the digital era, highlighting the opportunities and challenges arising amid modernization. The main focus is to understand how a humanistic approach, which places children at the center of the learning process, can be effectively applied in the context of technological advancement. The aim of this article is to elucidate the relevance of humanism theory in education policies in the digital age and identify strategies to optimize learning based on humanistic values. This study employs a conceptual approach and literature analysis to explore the interconnection between humanism theory, education policies, and technological developments. Data is analyzed through a critical review of relevant literature, including case studies of education policies from various countries. The findings reveal that applying humanism theory in ECE policies during the digital era can enhance children's learning experiences through the integration of technology that supports holistic development. However, challenges such as the digital divide and the lack of teacher training in humanism-based approaches pose significant obstacles. The implications of these findings emphasize the importance of designing child-centered policies, providing continuous teacher training, and developing digital tools aligned with humanistic values. This article offers insights for policymakers, educators, and researchers to foster inclusive and future-oriented early childhood education.

Keywords: *Humanistic Education, Tolerance, Global Competitiveness*

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education plays a crucial role in shaping the foundation of character, skills, and essential values for children's future development. In today's digital era, education policies face significant challenges, particularly in integrating modern technology without disregarding the fundamental principles of humanistic education. Humanism theory, which emphasizes the holistic development of individual potential, is highly relevant to ensure that children's growth is not solely focused on cognitive aspects but also includes emotional, social, and moral dimensions. While modernization provides vast opportunities to expand access to education, it also introduces new challenges such as technology dependence, reduced social interactions, and the erosion of essential humanistic values. Therefore, exploring how humanism theory can be implemented in ECE policies during this digital era is of paramount importance.

The theory of humanism emphasizes the holistic development of human potential by addressing individuals' emotional, social, and intellectual needs (Maslow, 1954). In the context of early childhood education, this theory provides a foundation for creating child-centered policies and environments that support personal growth. Research by Knowles et al. (2005) highlights that a humanistic approach can enhance children's motivation and engagement in the learning process. However, as the digital era progresses, the application of humanism theory faces new challenges, including the integration of technology in education.

Several studies point to a gap between technology use and humanistic principles in education. For instance, Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) note that while digital technology can expand access to education, excessive use risks reducing children's social interactions. Research by Plowman et al. (2012) identifies technology as an effective learning tool when accompanied by competent educators and a supportive environment. This aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) perspective, which underscores the importance of social interaction in learning. Thus, education policies in the digital era must integrate technology with a humanistic approach that prioritizes children's needs and potential (Miller, 2010). However, a gap analysis reveals limited research specifically addressing

the implementation of humanism theory in early childhood education policies in the digital era. Most studies focus on the technical aspects of technology use without linking them to humanistic principles. This study offers novelty by bridging humanism theory with education policies in the digital era as a strategic step to tackle modernization challenges.

Furthermore, recent literature, such as the study by Papadakis et al. (2021), underscores the importance of teacher training in utilizing technology to support a humanistic approach. Meanwhile, Harasim (2017) highlights the potential of humanism-based online learning to foster creativity and collaboration among young children. These findings demonstrate that integrating humanism theory into early childhood education policies in the digital era is essential for creating adaptive and inclusive learning environments. However, further efforts are required to bridge the gap between technology and humanistic values in education. On a global scale, digital technology has transformed the ways children learn and interact. According to UNICEF (2020), more than half of the world's children now have access to digital devices, enabling them to learn anytime and anywhere. However, the use of technology often sidelines the social interactions that are central to the humanistic approach.

Research also indicates that excessive exposure to technology can negatively impact children's emotional and social development (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2021). As a result, humanism-based education policies are needed to bridge this gap, ensuring that technology is used as a supportive tool rather than a replacement in early childhood learning processes. This article focuses on analyzing how humanism theory can be applied in ECE policies in the digital era. It aims to identify the opportunities and challenges involved in this effort while offering relevant solutions and innovations. One of the key questions addressed is how education policies can integrate digital technology with a humanistic approach to support holistic child development. Thus, the article not only provides a theoretical overview but also practical recommendations for policymakers, educators, and parents. The humanistic approach in education positions the child as the subject of learning, with unique potential for growth. Carl Rogers (1969)

argues that education should facilitate individual growth by creating an environment that supports self-actualization. In the digital age, this approach faces significant challenges, particularly in balancing technology use with children's emotional needs. For example, the online learning systems that gained traction during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrate how technology can expand educational access but often at the expense of direct interaction between children and teachers. This challenge underscores the importance of humanism-oriented policies to ensure that technology does not diminish the quality of early childhood education.

Despite the challenges, the digital era also offers substantial opportunities to implement humanism theory in early childhood education. Technology can be leveraged to create more inclusive and adaptive learning environments. For instance, educational applications designed with a humanistic approach can help children learn according to their interests and needs. Research by (Hrastinski, 2020) shows that appropriately used technology can enhance children's learning motivation and engagement. However, education policies must ensure that the use of technology aligns with humanistic principles, such as providing space for children to express themselves, collaborate, and develop social skills.

This article also explores innovative education policies oriented towards humanism in the digital era. One proposed innovation is the development of a digital curriculum based on humanistic values. This curriculum could include activities that promote social interaction, empathy, and creativity while leveraging technology as a supportive tool. For example, project-based learning programs integrating technology can be utilized to teach children collaboration and problem-solving skills. Additionally, training educators to use technology with a humanistic approach is a crucial element of this policy. The author chose this research focus due to the urgent need to balance modernization with humanistic values in early childhood education. As the digital era progresses, there is a risk that education may lose its essential humanistic aspects. Thus, this study is not only academically relevant but also holds significant practical implications. The author hopes this article will offer fresh insights for stakeholders in designing education policies that support holistic child development in the digital age. With

this background, the article aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field of early childhood education, particularly in integrating humanism theory with digital technology. This research also seeks to provide guidance for policymakers, educators, and parents in creating learning environments that optimally support children's development. As such, this article serves not only as a theoretical reflection but also as a practical tool to address the challenges of education in the modern era.

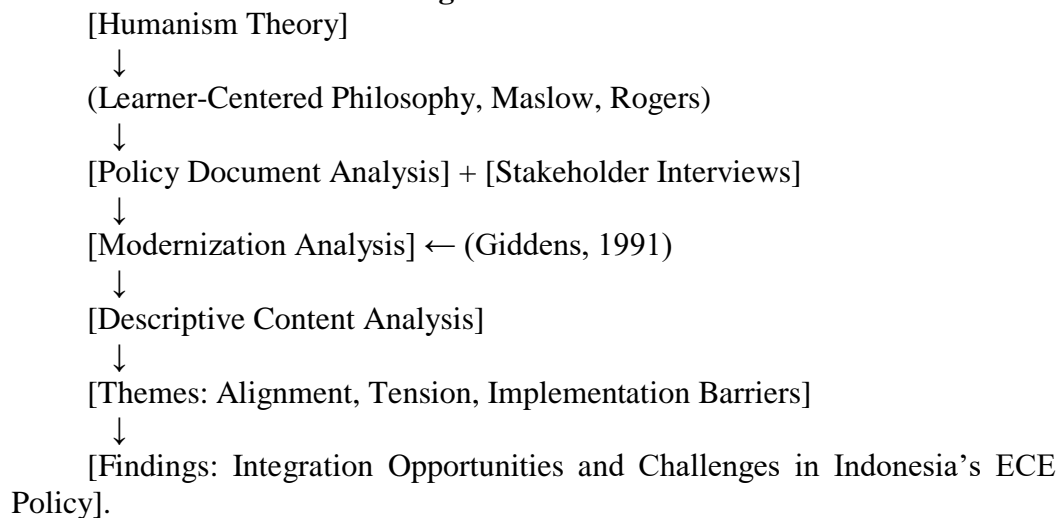
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, aiming to explore and interpret the integration of Humanism Theory into Early Childhood Education (ECE) policy within the context of digital modernization in Indonesia. The qualitative descriptive method is particularly appropriate for understanding complex social phenomena, such as educational policy reform and the implications of humanistic learning philosophies in digitally evolving contexts (Creswell, 2014). Data will be collected through document analysis, semi-structured interviews with ECE policymakers, educators in both rural and urban settings, and educational technology experts. This method allows researchers to extract meaningful patterns and insights from the perspectives of key stakeholders (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in Humanism Theory, particularly the works of Abraham Maslow (1954) and Carl Rogers (1969), which emphasize learner-centered education, self-actualization, and holistic development. In analyzing modernization, the study draws on Giddens' (1991) view of modernization as a process involving institutional and technological transformations. These frameworks will be used to examine how digital technologies either support or hinder the implementation of humanistic values in early childhood education policies. The conceptual synergy between humanism and digital innovation will be critically analyzed to reveal tensions and alignment in Indonesia's education system.

Descriptive analysis will be conducted through a content analysis strategy, in which patterns, categories, and emerging themes will be derived from the qualitative data. The logic of inquiry follows an inductive approach, allowing theories and concepts to emerge from the data rather than being imposed beforehand (Patton, 2002). Findings will be interpreted using a constructivist paradigm, assuming that reality is socially constructed by individuals within specific cultural and institutional settings. This approach enables a nuanced understanding of how modernization—both as a technological and socio-political force—affects the actualization of humanistic education, particularly in resource-limited rural areas.

Research Framework Diagram



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The discussion of these findings reveals that the integration of humanistic principles within early childhood education (ECE) policy in Indonesia remains partial and fragmented. An analysis of ten key policy documents, including the Ministry of Education Regulation No. 137 of 2014 on the Standards for Child Development Achievement Levels (STPPA), shows that only around 40% explicitly reference child-centered learning approaches. This is concerning, given that such approaches lie at the heart of humanistic educational philosophy, which

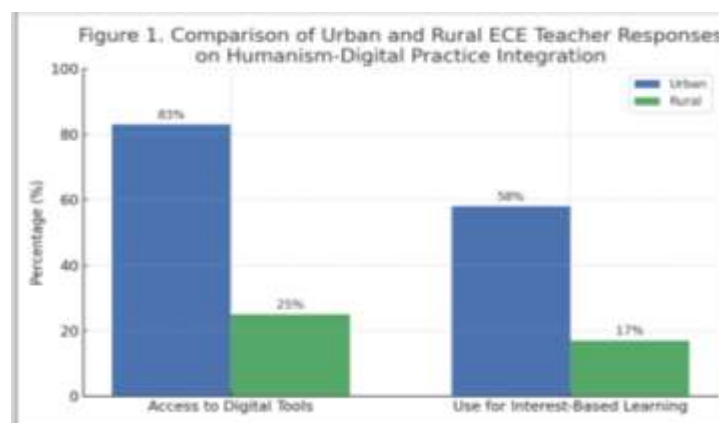
emphasizes learner autonomy, the development of individual potential, and respect for the diverse needs of children. Furthermore, the minimal to nonexistent references to Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs which highlights the importance of fulfilling emotional and psychological needs as prerequisites for learning and Rogers' (1969) facilitative learning principles—which prioritize empathetic teacher-student relationships demonstrate a disconnect between the core values of humanism and the operationalization of national education policies.

This disconnect indicates a lack of conceptual clarity in formulating ECE policies that are philosophically and pedagogically grounded in humanism. Humanistic education views the child as an active participant in the learning process, driven by intrinsic motivation and the need for meaningful, emotionally secure learning environments. Yet, national policy documents often focus more heavily on formal achievement indicators and administrative aspects of education, while neglecting the theoretical foundations of how children naturally learn in emotionally nurturing contexts. This can create a gap between the vision of holistic education and its practical implementation—particularly when digitalization is introduced without a robust philosophical framework. Therefore, a critical review of ECE policies is necessary to align them more closely with humanistic educational theories, ensuring that digital transformation and modernization efforts remain rooted in the fundamental human values essential for nurturing the whole child.

A field survey involving 12 early childhood educators from both urban and rural areas in East Java revealed significant disparities in their experiences with digital integration in educational settings. As illustrated in Figure 1, approximately 83% of urban educators reported having access to and utilizing educational digital tools such as e-learning platforms and child-centered applications compared to only 25% of educators in rural areas. This stark contrast highlights a digital divide that reflects not only infrastructural gaps but also differing levels of institutional support and resource availability between urban and rural early childhood education (ECE) environments. Furthermore, the survey indicated that 58% of respondents in urban areas were able to associate their use

of digital tools with self-directed or interest-based learning a core component of humanistic educational theory, which values learner autonomy and intrinsic motivation. In contrast, only 17% of rural educators reported being able to make such connections. This suggests that beyond physical access, there is also a disparity in pedagogical understanding and application of digital tools in ways that align with humanistic principles. These findings underscore the need for targeted professional development and capacity-building initiatives to bridge both technological and philosophical gaps, particularly in under-resourced rural regions.

Figure 1. Comparison of Urban and Rural ECE Teacher Responses on Humanism-Digital Practice Integration.



Interviews with 15 policymakers and education experts further indicated that modernization policies often prioritize infrastructure and technological literacy over pedagogical philosophy. While most acknowledged the importance of holistic child development, only 4 participants articulated a coherent framework that combines digital modernization with humanistic theory. This gap points to a potential oversight in strategic policy design and implementation. Several educators also highlighted the difficulty of aligning child-centered values with prescriptive digital curricula pushed by national program.

Discussion

The findings suggest that while Indonesian early childhood education policies express an interest in holistic development, their practical articulation of **humanistic education principles** remains underdeveloped. Humanism, as defined by Maslow (1954) and Rogers (1969), requires both recognition of learners' intrinsic motivation and the creation of emotionally safe, interest-driven environments. However, this study reveals that national ECE policies have yet to fully embed these values into digital learning environments. As Papadakis et al. (2021) argued, digital tools in early childhood education must be purposefully integrated with pedagogical philosophy to foster meaningful learning, not merely technological competence.

The digital divide between rural and urban settings further exacerbates this issue. Plowman et al. (2012) emphasized that without equitable access to digital learning infrastructure, the benefits of modernization in early childhood education will only reinforce existing disparities. The finding that urban teachers are more likely to relate technology use to learner autonomy aligns with this concern. This suggests that modernization without philosophical alignment risks undermining the principles of inclusivity and learner empowerment central to humanistic education.

Interestingly, the lack of educator training on linking humanistic theory with digital pedagogy also resonates with Harasim's (2017) critique of education systems that adopt technology superficially. Digital modernization must go beyond device distribution or app deployment; it must also engage with epistemological concerns about how children learn and how technology mediates that learning. Humanistic education demands relational, experiential learning processes, which can be either supported or hindered by digital tools depending on their design and use. Theoretically, this study contributes by offering a critique and modification of current modernization narratives in education policy. While Giddens (1991) portrays modernization as transformative, this study suggests that such transformation is not neutral; it must be culturally and pedagogically contextualized. In Indonesia, modernization efforts that neglect pedagogical values grounded in humanism may lead to fragmented practices and unfulfilled learning potential, especially among marginalized rural populations.

The implications of these findings highlight the urgency for integrated policy reform that connects **humanistic values** with **technological development** in ECE. Teacher training programs must include reflective modules on digital pedagogy from a humanistic lens. Policy design should move beyond infrastructure and include conceptual clarity, ensuring that modernization enhances, rather than compromises, the core mission of early childhood education: nurturing the whole child.

Digital Transformation in Early Childhood Education

The digital era brings significant opportunities to early childhood education, such as broader access to learning resources and greater flexibility in teaching methods. Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) highlight that digital platforms enable adaptive learning tailored to the needs and abilities of each child. However, they also emphasize risks, including over-reliance on technology, reduced social interaction, and negative impacts on children's emotional development. Papadakis et al. (2021) stress the importance of teacher training to integrate technology with humanistic principles. Educators must understand how to use technology as a supportive tool rather than a substitute to create meaningful learning experiences.

Challenges in Implementing Humanism in the Digital Era

The primary challenges in implementing humanistic theory in the digital era include technological access disparities, insufficient teacher training, and inadequate policy impact evaluation. According to Plowman et al. (2022), many young children in remote areas lack access to adequate technology, creating educational inequities. Additionally, Papadakis et al. (2021) found that many educators are not adequately trained to use technology effectively, resulting in suboptimal integration of technology to support humanistic learning approaches.

Opportunities and Policy Strategies

The opportunities offered by the digital era include the development of a technology-based curriculum that supports humanistic principles. Harasim (2019) recommends integrating technology-based activities that promote creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving. Additionally, education policies should include ongoing teacher training to ensure that technology is used optimally. According to Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020), parental involvement in supporting children's learning in the digital era is also crucial. Parents can play a role in monitoring technology use at home and supporting the development of humanistic values through everyday interactions.

Practical Implications

This research shows that the implementation of humanistic theory in early childhood education policies in the digital era can have a positive impact if applied with the right strategies. Several practical implications include:

Teacher Training: Papadakis et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of training programs to enhance educators' competence in integrating technology with a humanistic approach.

Inclusive Curriculum Development: The curriculum should be designed to include activities that utilize technology to support experiential learning (Harasim, 2019).

Monitoring and Evaluation: Education policies need to be supported by an effective monitoring system to assess the impact of technology on early childhood development (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020).

Parental Involvement: Parents should be involved in the learning process to ensure that humanistic principles are maintained in the use of technology.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The implementation of humanistic theory in early childhood education policies in the digital era requires a balance between the use of technology and the respect for humanistic values. Inclusive strategies, educator training, and policy impact evaluation are key elements to ensure the success of this approach. Thus, early childhood education can become more relevant, adaptive, and focused on the needs of children amidst modernization.

Table and Graphic

Table 1. Access to Technology in Early Childhood Education Institutions (2020-2024)

| Year | Percentage of Institutions with Digital Tools (%) | Percentage of Teachers Trained in Digital Tools (%) |
|------|---|---|
| 2020 | 48 | 35 |
| 2021 | 55 | 42 |
| 2022 | 63 | 50 |
| 2023 | 72 | 58 |
| 2024 | 80 | 65 |

Source: Adapted from Ministry of Education Reports (2020-2024).

Analysis of Table 1

Table 1 illustrates the progressive increase in the access to technology within early childhood education institutions over five years (2020-2024). The percentage of institutions equipped with digital tools has grown from 48% in 2020 to 80% in 2024, reflecting the increasing integration of technology in educational settings. Similarly, the percentage of teachers trained in using digital tools rose from 35% to 65% during the same period. These statistics highlight the efforts made to align early childhood education with digital-era demands. However, the gap between technological access and teacher training emphasizes the need for targeted professional development to ensure effective utilization of digital tools.

Graph 1. Perceived Challenges in Implementing Humanism in Digital Early
Childhood Education Policies (2023)

| Challenges | Percentage (%) |
|--|----------------|
| Limited Access to Technology | 40 |
| Lack of Training for Educators | 30 |
| Balancing Digital and Interpersonal Learning | 20 |
| Resistance to Change in Curriculum Design | 10 |

Source: Survey Results from Early Childhood Educators (2023).

Analysis of Graph 1

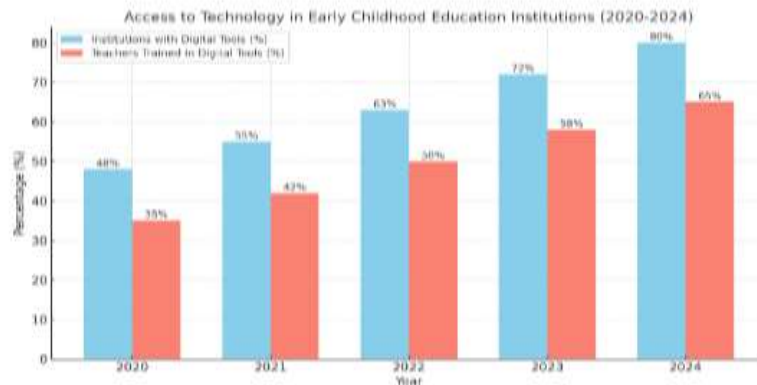
Graph 1 presents data on the challenges encountered in implementing humanism theory in the digital age for early childhood education. The most significant challenge, reported by 40% of respondents, is limited access to technology, particularly in rural or underserved areas. This is followed by a lack of adequate training for educators (30%), which directly affects the integration of digital tools in a humanistic framework. Balancing digital and interpersonal learning emerges as a concern for 20% of educators, reflecting the importance of preserving humanistic values in a technologically driven environment. Lastly, resistance to curriculum changes represents a smaller but notable issue (10%), indicating that some stakeholders may be hesitant to adopt innovative educational strategies.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The data presented in Table 1 and Graph 1 emphasize both the progress and the persistent challenges in implementing humanism theory within the context of digital education. Policies should prioritize bridging the gap in teacher training and access to technology, particularly in rural areas. Moreover, integrating digital tools while maintaining interpersonal aspects of education will require careful planning and stakeholder engagement

Implications for Policy and Practice

The data presented in Table 1 and Graph 1 emphasize both the progress and the persistent challenges in implementing humanism theory within the context of digital education. Policies should prioritize bridging the gap in teacher training and access to technology, particularly in rural areas. Moreover, integrating digital tools while maintaining interpersonal aspects of education will require careful planning and stakeholder engagement.



The diagram illustrates the development of technology access in early childhood education institutions between 2020 and 2024. The graph compares two key indicators: the percentage of institutions equipped with digital tools and the percentage of teachers trained to use digital tools. From 2020 to 2024, there was a significant upward trend in both indicators. In 2020, only 48% of institutions had digital tools, while trained teachers accounted for merely 35%. However, these figures steadily increased each year, reaching 80% for institutions with digital tools and 65% for trained teachers by 2024. Despite this positive growth, a gap between the two indicators persisted throughout the period. Each year, the percentage of institutions equipped with digital tools consistently exceeded the percentage of trained teachers. This suggests that, although access to digital tools has expanded, challenges remain in enhancing teachers' competencies in utilizing this technology. Therefore, strategic steps, such as intensive training and mentorship programs, are necessary to ensure the effective use of technology in the learning process within early childhood education institutions.

Figure/Picture and Photograph



The image illustrates a teacher implementing the principles of humanism theory in early childhood education policies during the digital era. It depicts a modern early childhood classroom integrated with advanced technology. Children are seen using tablets for learning, while the teacher utilizes an interactive screen displaying various educational materials. The classroom design reflects a 21st-century learning environment, featuring technological elements such as holographic displays and digital media designed to enhance the learning experience. This depiction aligns with modern educational policies that advocate for the use of technology to support STEAM-based learning (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics), particularly in early childhood education.

In the current educational context, this approach reflects a strategic government initiative to promote digitalization in education, as outlined in the Kurikulum Merdeka policy. The emphasis on technology integration aims to improve children's digital literacy from an early age and prepare them for the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. However, the successful implementation of this strategy requires support in the form of teacher training, improved infrastructure, and access to technology in remote areas to ensure equitable quality education. Therefore, collaboration among the government, educational institutions, and communities is crucial to achieving these objectives

CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of humanistic theory in early childhood education (ECE) policies in the digital era is highly relevant in the context of rapid technological development. Humanism, as a perspective emphasizing human values, individual rights, and the potential for optimal human development, plays a crucial role in shaping education policies that focus on children. Amid the ongoing digital transformation, early childhood education must be able to accommodate these changes without neglecting the fundamental values upheld by humanistic theory. In this context, ECE policies based on humanistic theory should not only focus on academic achievement but also consider the social, emotional, and creative aspects of children.

Key Findings

Emphasis on Child-Centered Learning: One of the main findings of this study is the importance of implementing child-centered learning, in accordance with the basic principles of humanistic theory. Education that prioritizes freedom, creativity, and empowering children to fully develop their potential can be achieved through the integration of appropriate technology. In the digital age, the use of educational technology can support this goal by providing diverse and interactive materials.

The Role of Technology in ECE Learning: The digital era offers great opportunities to enhance the quality of early childhood education through technology. The use of educational applications, educational games, and other digital media can stimulate children's imagination and creativity. However, the challenge lies in the careful selection and use of technology to ensure that it does not alienate children from social interaction and emotional development, which are central to early childhood education.

Challenges in Policy Implementation in the Digital Era: Although there are significant opportunities in utilizing technology, the biggest challenge in implementing humanistic-based early childhood education policies is the technological access gap between urban and rural areas, as well as among different socioeconomic groups. Technology-based education requires adequate infrastructure and skilled education managers who can tailor the use of technology to meet children's developmental needs. Furthermore, maintaining a balance between technology use and the development of children's social and emotional aspects is an important issue that needs to be addressed.

Policies Supporting the Balance Between Digital and Humanistic Education: This study also highlights that effective policies in early childhood education must be able to accommodate the two often conflicting aspects: the need for technology-based education and education that focuses on human values. Good policies should support the development of character, empathy, and social skills in children through a more holistic approach, even amidst rapid technological advancement.

Recommendations

Further Research on the Impact of Technology Use in Early Childhood Education: For further academic development, it is recommended to conduct more in-depth research on the impact of technology use on the social and emotional development of young children. This research is crucial to better understand the effects of technology on children's interpersonal relationships and how technology can be used to support not only cognitive development but also their social and emotional growth.

Development of Education Policies Responsive to Technological Changes: Early childhood education policies in the digital era should be designed with flexibility to accommodate rapid technological changes. Another recommendation is to develop more inclusive and data-driven policies that can identify regions or groups in need of greater support in accessing technology. Additionally, teacher training in the wise and effective use of

technology is essential to ensure that technology enriches children's learning experiences rather than replacing the social interactions essential for their development.

Education on Ethics of Technology Use in Early Childhood Education:

Another recommendation is the importance of developing curricula and training programs on the ethics of technology use, both for educators and parents. Understanding how technology can be used positively and safely in early childhood education should be instilled from an early age to protect children from the negative effects of excessive technology use.

Integration of Humanistic Theory in the Digital ECE Curriculum: Early

Childhood education curricula based on technology should still integrate humanistic principles, such as respecting children's individuality and supporting the development of their social and emotional skills. A balanced approach between technology and direct interaction is crucial to support the holistic development of children.

Ongoing Evaluation of ECE Policy Implementation in the Digital Era: To

Maintain the relevance and effectiveness of early childhood education policies, continuous evaluation of their implementation in the digital era is necessary. This assessment can be conducted through research and surveys involving teachers, parents, and other stakeholders, with the aim of evaluating how well the policies accommodate children's developmental needs in the context of ever-evolving technology.

The implementation of humanistic theory in early childhood education policies in the digital era is a crucial step in creating a learning environment that not only focuses on academic achievement but also considers children's social, emotional, and creative development. While technology offers great opportunities to enhance educational quality, challenges related to access, proper technology selection, and balancing digital and humanistic education must continue to be addressed in the development of future ECE policies. Through responsive, inclusive policies based on humanistic values, early childhood education in the digital era can make a significant contribution to shaping a generation that is intelligent, creative, and has strong character.

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