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Strengthening Ethical Competence in Digital Communication Among Students in West Kalimantan

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Article Information:

Received 22 11, 2024

Revised 05 05, 2025

Accepted 03 11, 2025

Keywords: Ethical Competence, Digital Communication

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Abstract

This research fundamentally aims to understand and describe the strengthening of ethical competence in digital communication among students in West Kalimantan. Based on the background review and analysis presented, the approach and method used in this study is a quantitative approach through a survey study, by distributing questionnaires to teachers in various districts/cities in West Kalimantan. The data obtained is collected and analyzed using statistical formulas, then presented in the form of tables, diagrams, or graphs to provide ease for readers in understanding the meaning of the data presented. The study concludes that: (1) strengthening ethical competence should be an integral part of the overall school program. Specific guidance from teachers in students' digital communication is highly needed; (2) strengthening ethical competence has several positive elements, particularly in fostering comfortable communication and a conducive learning environment that enables better interaction between students and teachers, as well as among students themselves; (3) strengthening ethical competence in digital communication for students covers several fundamental aspects, particularly regarding etiquette and the way to express gratitude in communication processes, initiating conversations, expressing ideas, or conveying information or thoughts in communication; (4) an evaluation of strengthening students' ethical competence in digital communication needs to be conducted, especially by involving all school elements, particularly teachers and school staff.

How to cite: Aunurrahman. (2025). *Strengthening Ethical Competence in Digital Communication Among Students in West Kalimantan*. *JETL (Journal of Education, Teaching and Learning)*, 10(1), 320-333. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.26737/jetl.v7i2.6286>

INTRODUCTION

Rapid advancements in information and communication technology have transformed social interactions and posed new challenges for educators. While digital platforms offer vast opportunities for learning and communication, they also expose students to ethical dilemmas such as cyberbullying, misinformation, and privacy violations (Floridi, 2020; Kalidjernih, 2011). Ethical competence—defined in this study as the ability to communicate digitally with integrity, respect, and responsibility—has become a crucial skill for students. According to Ribble (2011), Digital Citizenship encompasses digital ethics, literacy, and responsibility, providing a framework for fostering ethical behavior in digital spaces.

This research investigates how teachers in West Kalimantan reinforce ethical competence in students' digital communication. The province's cultural diversity and history of social tensions underscore the need for ethical digital engagement to promote tolerance and harmony. By understanding teachers' strategies and perspectives, this study seeks to provide insights that can inform educational policy and practice.

In facing the various dynamics of change that continue to evolve, particularly with advancements in information and communication technology, there are increasing demands on educators and schools to be sensitive to the phenomena of change and dynamics occurring among students and the entire school community. In everyday life, advancements in information and communication technology have undeniably provided individuals with many conveniences, especially in supporting interactive processes (West & Turner, 2007). An ethical approach to technological innovation involves user-centered design, inclusivity, and reducing the negative impacts that may arise from using this technology (Floridi, 2020), revealing that the primary motivation behind communication is understanding. Distance or other constraints are no longer issues in establishing communication, allowing people to interact with others anytime and anywhere, thus transforming the social order comprehensively (Werner & Tandkard, 2011). Much of this change process is based on information production (Kalidjernih, 2011:67), which has had a widespread and comprehensive impact, resulting in changes across various sectors of society and specific environments.

In empirical reality, information technology has played a role in accelerating the modernization and innovation in education. The impact of information technology on social change is evident in the significant increase in literacy (Subekti, 2017; Mulyana, 2000). Numerous studies have even revealed that social media today is not only a medium for interaction and communication but has also become a platform for identity recognition, online shopping, exchanging ideas, and, unfortunately, has given rise to new phenomena such as hate speech, online fraud, fake news, and the like. This phenomenon needs collective attention to ensure that the conveniences provided by information and communication technology in its various forms align with the expected ethical standards and societal values, particularly within educational institutions (Wido, 2010; Wuryandani, 2016: 208).

In society, the circulation of information has been greatly expanded by advancements in information technology. According to research by the Ministry of Communication and Information, at least 30 million Indonesian children and adolescents are already highly familiar with the digital world and spend much of their time in it, with minimal parental supervision. The weak parental supervision is due to parents' limited proficiency and lag in digital media usage. This phenomenon has led to declining morals and ethics among teenagers, largely due to lax parental monitoring and permissiveness in children's gadget use (Mughtarom, 2018).

Strengthening ethical competence in students' digital communication is an important effort to provide understanding and guidance to students on proper language use when conveying information, ideas, and thoughts, as well as adhering to appropriate etiquette in social interactions. In this regard, education plays a vital role in teaching and fostering digital citizenship among young citizens. Teachers hold the responsibility of reinforcing ethical competence in students as part of more meaningful social interaction (Roso, 2013). Therefore, it is recommended that educators seek innovative and holistic efforts to achieve a unified educational process (Majid, 2010: 58; Prasetyo

& Marzuki, 2016: 227). This condition facilitates dialogue, discussions, and exchanges of ideas to strengthen understanding and address ethical issues within the school and community.

Moreover, specific education and skills are needed to prepare citizens to contribute and engage in a digital society, equipping them with Digital Citizenship knowledge as a set of characteristics for digital citizens. Digital Citizenship is the ability to participate in society online (Mossberger, Karen, and Tolbert, Caroline, 2008:1). Digital Citizenship is a concept that helps teachers, technology leaders, and parents understand young students/technology users and encourages proper use of technology. It goes beyond being a teaching tool and serves as a means to prepare students/technology users for a technology-filled society. Digital Citizenship encompasses the ability to participate in a networked society, one of whose elements is digital ethics (Istiqomah & Widiyanto, 2023).

Understanding digital ethics is expected to guide digital citizens towards a more positive direction, fulfilling the mission of Smart and Good Citizens. The vision of the 21st-century curriculum and learning essentially focuses on developing "learning intelligence" across the dimensions of social, cultural, political, economic, and technological intelligences. Digital ethics is increasingly important as the number of digital media users grows each year. The Association of Indonesian Internet Service Providers (APJII) reports that Indonesia's internet-connected population reached 210 million in 2021-2022, up from 175 million before COVID-19 (Wahyudi, 2024:1).

The reinforcement of ethical competence among students is integral to character formation and development. As part of character reinforcement, it cannot be done sporadically or partially; instead, it must be implemented through a planned, systematic, directed, and sustainable program over an extended period, both within and beyond classroom learning activities. Through the learning process, this can be integrated across all subjects. Research findings indicate that instilling character values can be effectively developed through all subjects, and character building in students has proven effective through synergistic development of various learning methods (Ayi, 2018; Fauzi, Zainudin & Rosyid, 2018:83).

Strengthening students' ethical competence is expected to foster harmony in communication and interaction between students, as well as between students and teachers and the entire school community. Additionally, mastering digital ethics will help avoid many conflicts, enhance digital security, and prevent digital crimes. Thus, understanding, internalizing, and mastering digital literacy is highly beneficial for future education (Isrokatun, 2022). A school culture built on the foundation of ethical competence according to established rules will help create a positive school climate that reflects a positive culture for the institution's sustainability. Positive culture is a culture that improves school quality and the quality of life for its members (Moerdiyanto, 2012). A positive school culture, as evidenced by research by Opata, Alfred & Stephen (2017), not only improves interpersonal relationships within the school but also fosters healthy competition. Moreover, a good school culture is one of the factors that promotes teacher professionalism.

Based on the above analysis, this research is substantively aimed at understanding the reinforcement of ethical competence implemented by teachers among students in West Kalimantan. Given its diverse ethnic, cultural, religious, and traditional backgrounds across various regions or districts, West Kalimantan is likely to have diverse approaches to reinforcing students' ethical competence. West Kalimantan's history of being a conflict-prone province underscores the

importance of strengthening tolerance and social harmony, including among students. Ultimately, the reinforcement of ethical competence contributes to creating a harmonious and tolerant social climate by fostering positive habits in students to practice ethics in communication, especially digital communication. Teachers' experiences in providing guidance, support, and addressing various educational issues will influence their perspectives and methods in strengthening students' ethical competence. Hence, it is considered important to gather information on this matter as a reference and enrichment for overall student character development.

METHODS

Participants and Sampling

The study involved 350 teachers (120 elementary, 115 junior high, and 115 senior high) from various districts in West Kalimantan. Participants were selected using stratified random sampling to capture demographic diversity in terms of location, age (25 to 58 years), gender, and teaching experience (2 to 30 years).

Instruments

The questionnaire was developed based on existing scales, including Ribble's Digital Citizenship framework (2011) and adapted from Istiqomah & Widiyanto (2023). It included 30 items covering four dimensions: (1) Ethical Awareness, (2) Digital Etiquette, (3) Responsible Communication, and (4) Evaluation Practices. Content validity was ensured through expert review, and a pilot test yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89, indicating high reliability.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected via online and paper-based questionnaires, depending on school access to technology. Descriptive statistics—frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations—were used to analyze the data. SPSS version 26 facilitated statistical analysis. Tables and figures present the data and interpretations. To obtain the necessary information/data in line with the objectives of this research, the following research steps were taken: (a) analyzing data/information or findings from previous research related to the research theme, (b) distributing questionnaires to teachers in West Kalimantan, (c) conducting data analysis and presenting the research findings. The subjects of this research are elementary, junior high, and senior high school teachers in West Kalimantan, spread across several districts and cities within the province. Data collection was carried out through indirect communication, by providing questionnaires to teachers both digitally and manually, depending on the available technological facilities or access in each school. Data obtained through the questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistical formulas and subsequently presented in the form of tables, graphs, or images to facilitate readers' understanding of the data's meaning.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Orientation of Ethical Competency Strengthening for Students in Digital Communication

The orientation of strengthening ethical competencies for students in digital communication serves as an argumentative framework and a primary guide for teachers in understanding the

importance of enhancing students' ethical competencies at school. In this study, the orientation of ethical competency strengthening includes teachers' views on the importance of reinforcing ethical competencies in digital communication, the integration of ethical reinforcement into school programs, the involvement of teachers and school staff, and the importance of providing specific guidance in digital communication to strengthen students' ethical competencies. Based on the summary of teachers' responses to the dimension of ethical competency strengthening orientation for students in digital communication, the findings are presented in the following illustration:

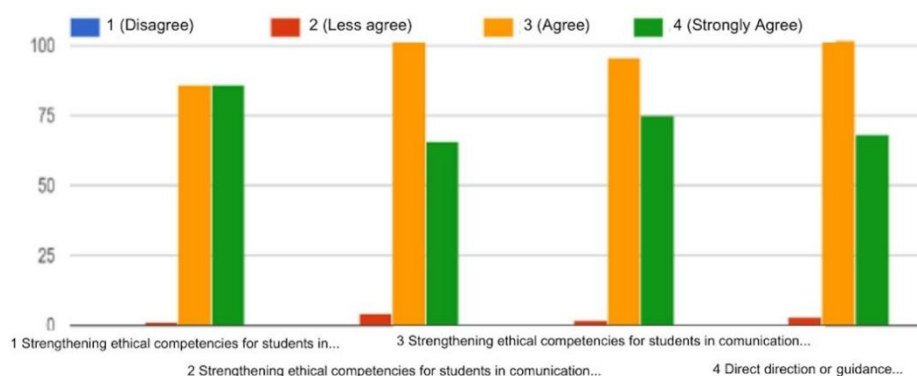


Figure 1: Orientation of Ethical Competency Strengthening for Students in Digital Communication

Based on the data presented in the above graph, the following interpretations can be made. The majority of teachers agree and strongly agree that: (a) establishing an orientation for strengthening ethical competencies in digital communication is a very important and fundamental part of ensuring that students interact in a positive and responsible manner; (b) ethical competency strengthening should be an integral part of the overall school program, where digital ethics is not seen as a separate initiative but as an inseparable part of the curriculum and school activities. This integration is essential to ensure that all aspects of school life support the development of students' digital ethics; (c) the involvement of teachers and school staff is seen as a crucial factor, indicating that the success of a digital ethics program heavily depends on the support and active participation of everyone within the school environment; (d) specific guidance and direction in digital communication are needed to strengthen students' ethical competencies and are expected to provide practical guidance to students in addressing communication challenges in the digital world.

2. The Essence/Usefulness of Strengthening Ethical Competence in Digital Communication for Students

The essence or usefulness of strengthening ethical competence for students in digital communication is a perspective, or the results of studies and observations by teachers regarding phenomena occurring in the school environment related to ethical dimensions among students in the use of digital communication technologies. From these digital communication phenomena, teachers form views or conclusions about the importance of strengthening this ethical competence in digital communication for students. Based on a summary of teachers' responses to the essence/usefulness of strengthening ethical competence in digital communication for students, the results are presented in the following image.

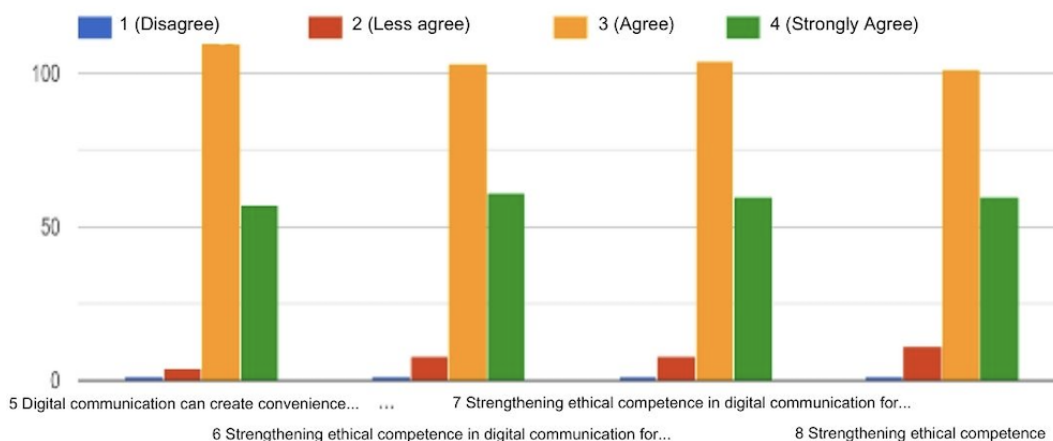


Figure 2: The Essence/Usefulness of Strengthening Ethical Competence in Digital Communication for Students

Based on the data presented in the graph above, the interpretation can be made that the majority of teachers agree and strongly agree that strengthening ethical competence in digital communication is essential for: (a) fostering a comfortable communication and conducive learning environment, which indirectly impacts social dynamics within the school environment, enhancing the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process, and promoting students' emotional balance; (b) encouraging a safer learning environment, including protecting students from cyberbullying, the spread of false information, and other threats that may arise from unethical digital interactions; (c) fostering positive student behavior, showing the belief that digital ethics contributes to the development of students' positive character, such as responsibility, respect, and empathy in online interactions; (d) promoting respect and mutual regard among peers, which is necessary for building a harmonious and inclusive school community, where differences of opinion are valued and interactions occur in a respectful atmosphere.

3. Aspects of Strengthening Ethical Competence in Digital Communication for Students

The aspects of strengthening ethical competence for students in digital communication are the key components or dimensions necessary to develop overall ethical competence in students. These dimensions form a comprehensive part of teachers' efforts to strengthen ethics in students, creating a more conducive academic atmosphere that supports the learning process and school programs as a whole. Based on a summary of teachers' responses to the aspects of strengthening ethical competence in digital communication for students, the results are presented in the following image.

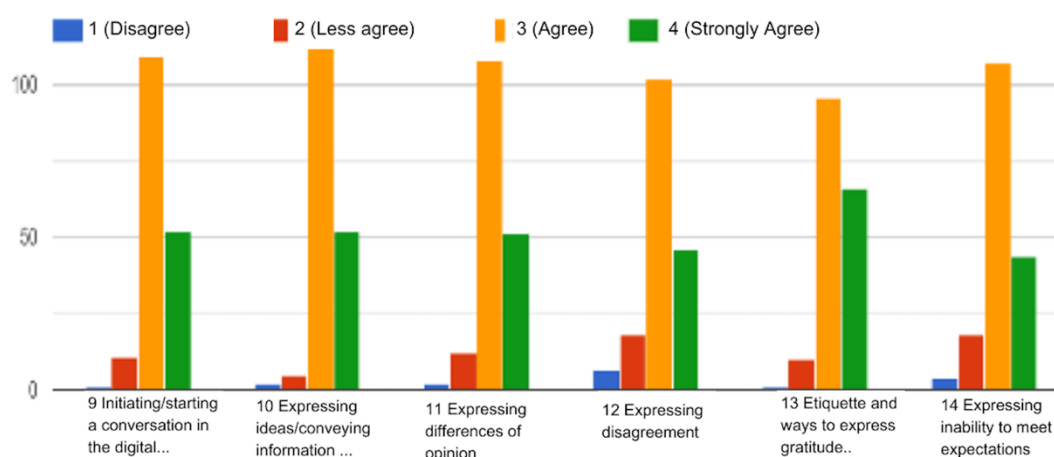


Figure 3: Aspects of Strengthening Ethical Competence in Digital Communication for Students

Based on the data presented in the image above, the interpretation can be made that the majority of teachers agree and strongly agree that the essential aspects of strengthening ethical competence, based on the teachers' perspectives, include: (a) starting/initiation of conversations in digital communication processes, as the ability to begin conversations ethically on digital platforms is a crucial foundational skill for students to build positive and productive interactions; (b) expressing ideas/sharing information or thoughts, which includes the ability to communicate clearly, honestly, and respectfully towards others' rights; (c) expressing differences of opinion when responding in digital communication, in which students need to be equipped with skills to discuss and debate constructively without causing conflict or hurting others' feelings; (d) expressing disagreement with something stated in the communication process, although student respondents may face challenges in expressing disagreement ethically, requiring more appropriate learning approaches; (e) regarding ethics and ways to express gratitude in communication, as appreciation for others' contributions can strengthen social relationships and create a positive atmosphere in interactions, especially in digital communication; (f) expressing the inability to meet expectations or requests in the communication process, where students need to be guided on how to communicate their limitations ethically, without creating negative impressions or diminishing respect from others.

4. Evaluation of Changes and Achievement of Ethical Competence in Digital Communication

The evaluation of changes and achievement of ethical competence in digital communication, which is one of the aspects examined in this study, is an activity aimed at obtaining information from teachers about the importance of evaluating the strengthening of ethical competence in digital communication that is conducted by the school, particularly by teachers, in relation to the use of digital technology by students during their communication processes. Based on a summary of teachers' responses to the aspects of evaluation of changes and achievement of ethical competence in digital communication for students, the results are presented in the following image.

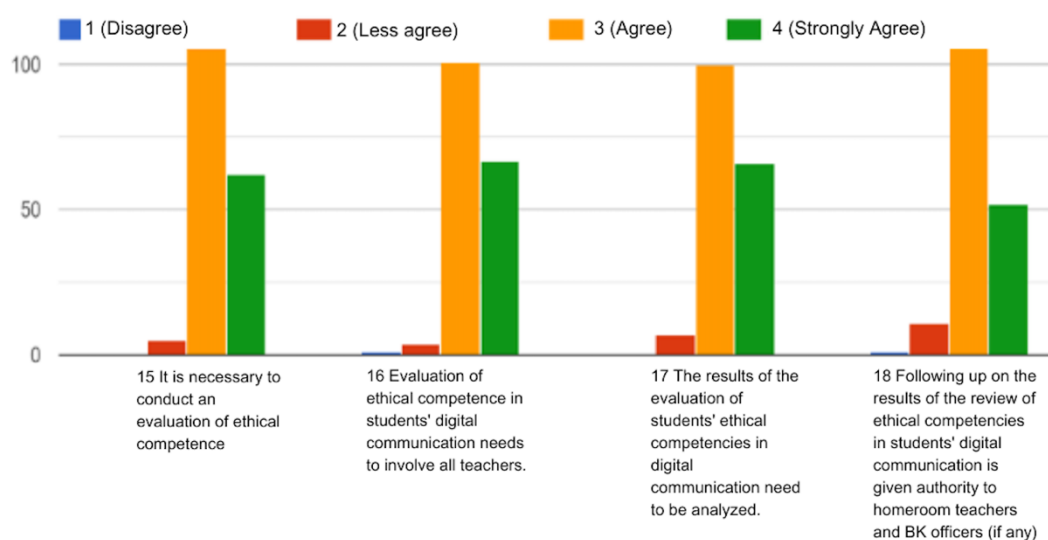


Figure 4: Evaluation of Changes and Achievement of Ethical Competence in Digital Communication

Based on the data presented in the graph above, the interpretation can be made that the majority of teachers agree and strongly agree that the evaluations needed for strengthening ethical competence in digital communication include: (a) evaluation of overall ethical competence, which is important for measuring the effectiveness of ethical strengthening programs and identifying areas or aspects that need improvement; (b) evaluation of overall ethical competence, where this evaluation is essential for measuring the effectiveness of ethical strengthening programs and identifying aspects requiring enhancement; (c) evaluation of the involvement of all teachers in ensuring that the evaluation includes various perspectives and is applied consistently across all aspects of learning; (d) implementation of analysis and discussion of evaluation results involving all school elements with a collaborative approach, which is crucial for formulating effective follow-up strategies and ensuring that the entire school community is committed to the development of digital ethics; (e) authority to follow up on the evaluation findings, where competent units such as the Guidance and Counseling unit and class advisors are authorized to follow up on the evaluation results.

Discussion

Strengthening ethical competence in digital communication is an important step in preparing students to face the challenges of the digital age. This not only helps them maintain personal safety in cyberspace but also shapes them into responsible digital citizens who contribute to a healthy digital community. Digital ethics teaches students not only to be tech-savvy but also to possess the necessary social and moral skills in this rapidly evolving era of complex digital communication, which continues to be a growing trend. Numerous studies support the importance of teaching digital ethics in schools. Ott and Tiozzo (2022) emphasize that digital media ethics is an essential part of overall digital competence, aimed not only at enhancing students' technological skills but also at helping them lead better lives. As part of character development, strengthening ethical competence will contribute to (1) fostering motivation to improve, (2) a dislike for lying, (3) respect for parents and love for others, (4) gratitude for what is received, (5) respect for others, (6) an increasing ability

to appreciate teamwork, (7) nurturing leadership qualities, (8) becoming more independent, caring for the environment, and (9) developing a habit of helping friends (Maunah, 2015: 94).

Digital communication has become an inseparable part of students' lives in this digital age. The use of social media, instant messaging, and other online platforms facilitates communication but also presents challenges, particularly regarding ethics and behavior. Therefore, it is important to find positive and constructive ways to guide students toward strengthening their ethical competence in digital communication, especially in everyday communication applied in both school and broader social life (Astari C. Sari, et al., 2018). Ethics in digital communication is not only important for protecting individual security but also for building trust among users in the environment (West and Berg, 2021; Regan, 2016).

Strengthening ethical competence in digital communication is crucial to help students not only understand technology but also use it responsibly and ethically (Amalia, 2023; Terry Flew, 2019). This enables them to become wise and ethical individuals in the ever-evolving digital world. As is well known, ethical competence in digital communication includes understanding and applying moral values in online interactions. Digital communication ethics involves a moral responsibility to act with integrity and respect for others in all online interactions (Kearney and McMahon, 2020).

The strengthening of this ethical competence is essential because the digital world has characteristics that differ from face-to-face communication, such as anonymity and widespread access to information. According to Howard Gardner and Katie Davis (2013), students must be equipped with ethical skills so they can interact healthily in a digital space that is often unsupervised. Without an understanding of digital ethics, students are vulnerable to engaging in inappropriate behaviors that violate social norms, such as spreading false information, hate speech, or cyberbullying. The concept of digital citizenship also emphasizes that digital ethics involves understanding how to behave properly online. This includes personal responsibility in managing digital identities, safeguarding personal data, and respecting others' digital rights. The essence of this strengthening is to create students who have integrity in communication and use technology in ways that benefit themselves and others (Ribble, 2011; Crawford & Schultz, 2019).

The primary purpose of strengthening ethical competence in digital communication is to create a safe and conducive digital ecosystem for learning and interaction. Students with strong ethical competence are more likely to avoid negative practices such as cyberbullying, spreading hoaxes, or identity theft. According to Livingstone and Haddon (2009), students need to understand how social norms and laws apply in the digital world, and this strengthening will help them make responsible decisions in their daily digital interactions. Furthermore, strengthening ethical competence can enhance students' ability to build a positive digital reputation. The importance of a digital reputation as a vital asset must be maintained from an early stage (Steyer, 2012; Gillespie, 2018). Students who understand ethics will be more cautious in sharing personal information, producing digital content, and interacting with others online. This not only helps maintain personal security but also strengthens awareness of others' rights in the digital environment. Strengthening ethical competence also supports the formation of a more inclusive and positive digital culture. Students will value differing opinions, maintain civility in communication, and reject all forms of discrimination or hate speech on social media and other digital platforms. Byron (2008) states that

good digital ethics education can create a more tolerant generation that is aware of the social impact of their digital behavior.

The aspects of strengthening digital communication competence for students are overall aimed at achieving digital awareness. In this dimension, students are guided to understand how digital information can persist and spread widely and how this can affect their own reputation and that of others. Additionally, students are guided toward achieving digital integrity. A concrete manifestation of digital integrity is the ability to respect others' rights and ensure the accuracy of the information shared. Furthermore, it also encourages digital empathy. The key focus of this aspect is to develop the ability to empathize in digital communication, which can prevent the spread of hatred and ensure that interactions remain positive and constructive. The aspects of strengthening ethical competence in digital communication for students involve several important dimensions to support students in using technology responsibly.

In addition to the above aspects of strengthening, some key aspects of reinforcement are as follows: First, digital awareness and online ethics. In this aspect, students need to understand how technology can affect the way they communicate, including aspects of privacy, data security, and respect for others' rights. Effective digital education must include an understanding of the ethical norms that apply in online communication. Disinformation, fake news, and privacy violations are examples of ethical challenges that need to be addressed through digital ethics education (Han et al., 2021).

The second aspect of reinforcement is the application of ethics in online social interactions. Digital communication requires the same ethical standards as face-to-face interactions. This includes polite behavior on social networks, avoiding cyberbullying, and considering the impact of words and actions in digital spaces. Experts emphasize the importance of building a digital culture that respects others and adheres to the rules of using digital platforms (Global Alliance, 2023).

The third dimension of reinforcement is the development of digital literacy skills. Digital competence is not only related to technical skills but also to social and emotional skills. Students must be able to identify trustworthy information, use technology effectively, and be aware of the impact of digital communication on themselves and others. Developing digital literacy skills is crucial to ensuring that students can responsibly participate in an increasingly complex digital environment (Stumbrienė et al., 2023).

Another fundamental aspect is the strengthening of teachers' competence in teaching digital ethics. Teachers play a key role in guiding students to understand and apply ethics in digital communication. Professional training for teachers, including digital competence, is necessary to ensure that they can provide relevant education for students in the rapidly changing digital context (Revuelta-Domínguez et al., 2022). By implementing these aspects, it is hoped that students can develop ethical competence that will help them interact in the digital world in a safe, responsible, and ethical manner (Aziz, 2009; Amin, 2013: 11).

In recent literature, several expert opinions emphasize the importance of ethical competence in digital communication: (1) the application of ethical principles in the digital world involves students' ability to identify and avoid unethical actions, such as cyberbullying, plagiarism, or privacy violations. This is supported by Howard Gardner (2013), who highlights that the generation growing up in the digital environment needs to be more aware of the ethical impact of their actions, especially on online platforms, (2) the importance of digital literacy: Recent research shows that

strong digital literacy can help students develop ethical competence. According to a report from the Pew Research Center (2021), the ability to sift through correct information and understand the ethical codes in cyberspace is crucial to avoiding misinformation and maintaining integrity while communicating digitally. This aligns with the importance of understanding copyright, data privacy, and self-protection in online interactions. (3) assessment of competence achievement: Evaluation of ethical competence often uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The European Commission (2020) through its "Digital Education Action Plan" emphasizes the importance of integrating ethical assessment in digital curricula in schools, where students are not only assessed based on technical abilities but also on their attitudes and ethical awareness.

In addition to these views, recent research conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER, 2022) shows that students who receive early digital ethics education tend to demonstrate more responsible behavior on digital platforms. They are more aware of their rights and responsibilities in the digital space and are better able to make the right decisions when faced with dilemmas, such as the dissemination of unverified information. Overall, the evaluation of the achievement of ethical competence in digital communication includes measuring how well students understand and apply the principles of digital ethics. The use of evaluation tools such as direct observation, case studies, and questionnaires can provide valuable insights into students' ability to interact responsibly and ethically in the digital world.

CONCLUSIONS

Some specific conclusions from this study are outlined as follows:

- 1) The orientation of strengthening ethical competence in digital communication for students must have a clear and specific direction, and schools should integrate it into their overall school program. Specific guidance in digital communication for strengthening students' ethical competence is crucial.
- 2) Strengthening ethical competence in digital communication for students has essential and beneficial uses in many ways, especially in fostering comfortable communication and a conducive, safe learning environment that enables better interaction between students and teachers as well as among students themselves.
- 3) Strengthening ethical competence in digital communication for students involves several essential aspects. Key aspects requiring reinforcement include (a) ethics and how to express gratitude in communication, (b) initiating conversations in communication processes, and (c) expressing ideas/information or thoughts in communication.
- 4) Strengthening ethical competence in digital communication for students requires evaluation, especially to assess changes and achievements, involving all school elements, particularly

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