



DIGITAL PARENTING: A MILLENNIAL WAY ON SAFEGUARDING EARLY CHILDHOOD

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Abstract

Today's technological advances present challenges not only to adults but have also targeted early childhood. So that parents play an important role in educating and protecting children in the digital era. This research aims to determine the description of digital parenting engaged by parents in early childhood. This research is a mixed methods research with a sample size of 50 respondents from various kindergartens in Parepare City, South Sulawesi. The research instrument used for quantitative data is a digital parenting questionnaire with a Likert scale aimed at measuring the digital parenting response of parents of early childhood, while qualitative data used interview guidelines to examine more deeply the efforts and steps taken by parents in educating and protecting AUD in the digital era. The data analysis technique used is a descriptive technique with percentages. The results showed that parents engaged digital parenting are based on the principles of digital parenting consisting of the principle of norms, the impact of digital technology and the impact of digital messages. Digital world parenting, then, becomes crucial to balance children's interaction with the real world and the environment, and to stimulate children's thinking as well. Therefore, it is imperative for parents to comprehend and implement digital parenting in order to exert greater control over their children's usage of digital gadgets through the establishment of parental guidelines. The findings of this study can serve as a valuable resource for parents in their efforts to enhance their role in educating and safeguarding children in the digital age.

Keywords: Parenting, Digital Era, Early Childhood

INTRODUCTION

In the millennial era, technology and information have become central elements in modern society. The rapid pace of technological development has brought about swift changes, profoundly influencing individual lifestyles. One significant impact can be observed in how parents approach child-rearing. In the past, children often engaged in outdoor play with their peers, free from the constraints of technology. However, contemporary parenting trends tend to limit children, resulting in reduced exploration of their environments. This shift is partly due to children being increasingly "entangled" in technological advancements.

The swift progress in technology has led to the classification of children as digital natives—a generation that, from birth, has been immersed in digital technology and has developed proficiency in its use (Ulfah, 2020). This phenomenon is evident even among early childhood. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency in 2022, approximately 33.44 percent of the early childhood population uses gadgets. Specifically, 25.5% of children aged 0-4 years and 52.76% of those aged 5-6 years use these devices. Furthermore, 24.956% of children capable of accessing the internet are predominantly within the 5-6 year-age range (Napitulu, 2023).

Parents are expected to educate and protect their children from various issues arising from technological advancements. One prominent concern is the use of gadgets. McCrindle predicts that children in the digital era will be inseparable from gadgets, exhibit reduced social interaction, and develop highly individualistic behaviors (Pitriyani & Widjayatri, 2022). The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that 10-15% of children worldwide suffer from mental health disorders, such as developmental disabilities, depression, anxiety, and behavioral issues, with 5% attributed to excessive gadget use. The Ministry of Health reports that approximately 7% of children experience mental health disorders, including developmental delays (both fine and gross motor skills), hearing impairments, and emotional disturbances. Of these, it is estimated that 3% of children's mental health issues are linked to excessive gadget use (Kurnia, 2020).

The data from Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection reported a continuous rise in child abuse cases, increasing from 16,106 cases in 2022 to 18,175 cases in 2023. This includes cases of online child abuse through online games (Aranditio, 2024). Currently, online games are also targeting early childhood. Numerous studies have explored the impact of internet and gadget use on early childhood development. Excessive use of gadgets has been shown to have adverse effects on children's social and emotional development, such as sleep disturbances, increased introversion, and reduced creativity (Rismala et al., 2021).

As children spend more time using gadgets, they may experience attention disorders, psychological issues, and obesity due to decreased physical activity (Hidayati & Zaman, 2021). Unrestricted gadget use can also heighten aggressive behavior, where children may struggle to control their impulses, resulting in actions like yelling or physical contact if their gameplay is interrupted (Iftaql Janah & Diana, 2023), as well as crying, anger, hitting, and fighting (Mil & Shanzivani, 2023). A study conducted in Balikpapan found a positive correlation between the intensity of gadget use and aggressive behavior in preschool children (ages 4-6); the higher the intensity of gadget use, the more pronounced the aggressive behavior in children (Nikmah & Lubis, 2021).

Parents, as the primary and most influential environment for their children, play a crucial role in educating and protecting them in this era of technological advancement. Parents have the responsibility to nurture, educate, and guide their children through developmental stages that prepare them for societal life (Ruli, 2020). As such, the foundation of education is established within the family. The family serves as the place where emotional interactions and life experiences are formed (Nurul Fadhilah & Mukhlis, 2021). Given the importance of the family as an educational environment, parents must equip themselves with knowledge that supports the upbringing of their children, a practice

commonly referred to as parenting. Parenting is understood as the parental program that focuses on the physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual development of children from infancy through adulthood (Ulfah, 2020). Parents utilize available resources within the family and community through self-directed learning activities. They engage in continuous interaction with their children through various activities, such as providing clothing, food, and shelter, as well as guiding and protecting them as they grow, particularly in this era of technological advancement.

Today, digital technology is increasingly pervasive in family life. Both parents and children are users of digital media in various forms, such as computers, the internet, and games. While each technological innovation brings both positive and negative impacts, it offers convenience and introduces new ways of carrying out human activities. Therefore, parents must adapt their parenting methods to the current technological advancements through digital parenting. Digital parenting refers to parenting strategies that align with children's habits of using gadgets or digital devices (Ulfah et al., 2021). The key aspect of digital parenting is that parents must understand when it is appropriate to introduce gadgets to their children. Beyond simply setting rules, digital parenting can involve parents discussing their own experiences with gadgets with their children and explaining the rationale behind the rules governing gadget use. The general principles of digital parenting include: 1) The norm principle, where parents need to establish their family's core values before parenting, as content boundaries—good or bad—depend heavily on these values; 2) The impact of digital technology, where prolonged screen exposure can cause eye strain, health issues such as obesity, and delayed growth; 3) The influence of digital messages, which can shape users' perspectives and thought patterns (Ulfah, 2020).

However, parents face various challenges in guiding their children when accessing technology. Previous studies have explored the topic of digital parenting. However, this study is crucial to understanding the digital parenting practices of parents of early childhood children in the city of Parepare in educating and protecting their children in today's digital age.

METHODOLOGY

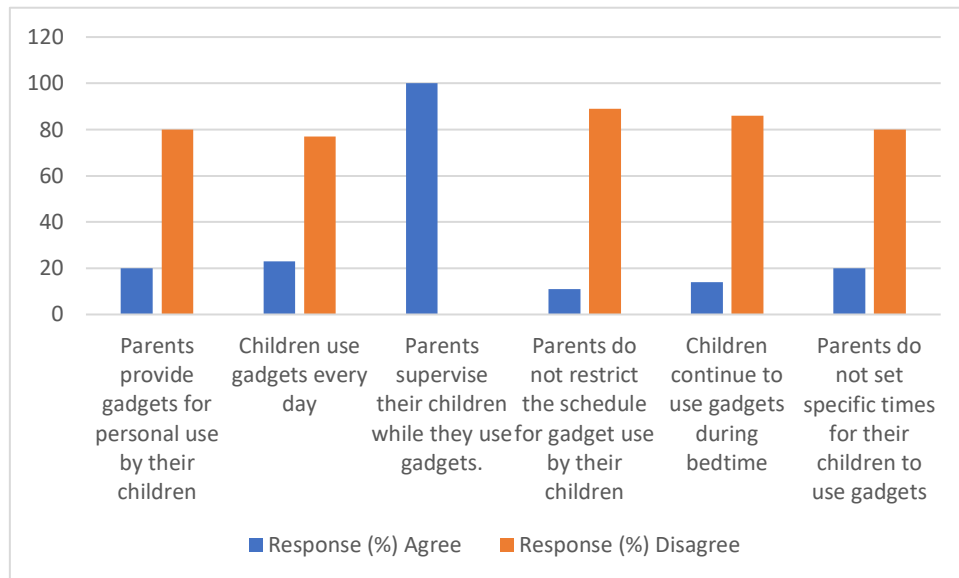
This study employs a mixed methods approach using a concurrent mixed methods strategy, which integrates both quantitative and qualitative data collected simultaneously (Purwanza et al., 2022). The research subjects consist of 50 parents of early childhood children from various kindergartens in the city of Parepare. A random sampling technique was employed, as each parent had an equal chance of being selected as a subject. The data analysis techniques used include descriptive analysis, where interview results are described and matched with the relevant theoretical framework. A percentage technique was also utilized to obtain results related to the principles of digital parenting.

In this study, quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously and then compared. In practice, the researchers distributed a digital parenting questionnaire using a Likert scale to gather quantitative data, focusing on parents' responses to digital parenting practices. Following the questionnaire, the researchers conducted interviews with the parents to supplement the previous data. An interview guide was used to delve deeper into the efforts and strategies parents employ to educate and protect their early

childhood children in the digital age. The subsequent analysis of both data sets revealed that the quantitative and qualitative data were mutually supportive.

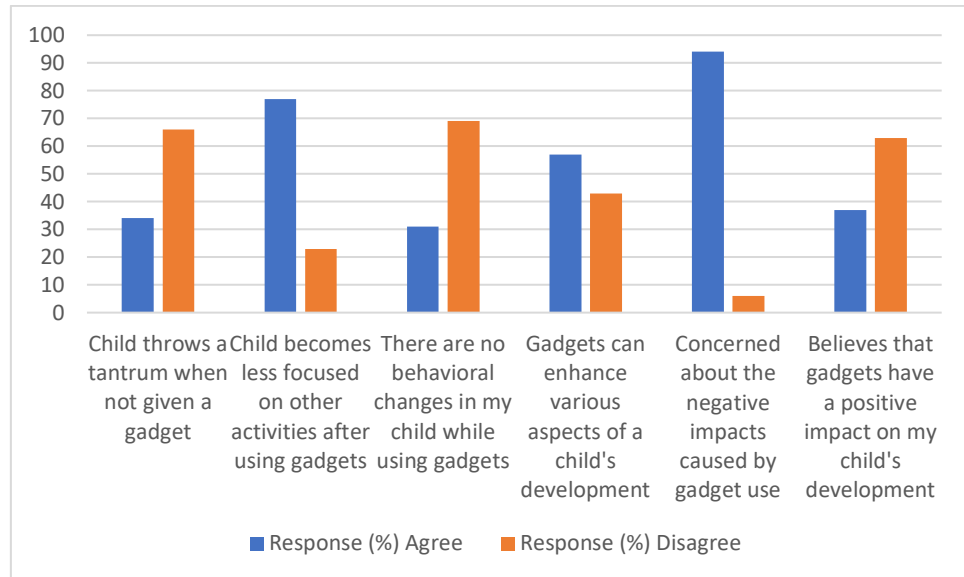
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative data analysis is based on the scores from the digital parenting questionnaire, which refers to the principles of digital child-rearing, including:



Picture 1. Results of the Normative Principles Questionnaire

The data above illustrate that parents are striving to establish fundamental values in their children's gadget use. Specifically, 80% of parents do not provide a dedicated gadget for their children, 100% of parents maintain supervision over their children's gadget use, and 80% of parents limit gadget use and regulate the time their children spend on these devices. Parenting is an interactive process where parents guide, educate, and take responsibility for their children's development. Digital parenting involves clearly defining boundaries, guiding, and supervising children in their use of digital media (Harianja et al., 2022). Parents are expected to set limits and rules for using digital devices to protect and monitor their children in the digital age, preventing negative impacts. Therefore, the role of parents in educating their children is crucial, as educating children is both a duty and responsibility of parents (Aslan, 2019; Juwita et al., 2022). Parental supervision and restrictions on online activities and screen time can reduce the risk of negative physical and mental health effects on children (Faizah et al., 2022). Regarding the application of normative principles in digital-era parenting, parents should also provide special supervision to prevent negative impacts on their children's moral character development (Yunita et al., 2021). Given the limitations parents face in monitoring all the information presented to their children through digital media, digital parenting requires parents to educate and instill moral values in their children's viewing habits, ensuring control to prevent exposure to content that contradicts the values and character taught to them. Parents should strive to reinforce positive values in every program their children watch.



Picture 2. Results of the Digital Technology Impact Questionnaire

The data above provides an overview that parents perceive both positive and negative impacts of digital technology on their children. Some impacts perceived by parents include: 66% of parents did not find their children throwing tantrums when not given gadgets, 77% of children became less focused on other activities, and 69% noticed changes in their children's behavior while using gadgets.

Technological advancements inevitably bring both positive and negative consequences, making it the parents' responsibility to anticipate their children's behavior towards technology. Susanto (in Yunita et al., 2021) stated the positive impacts of digital technology on young children: 1) Children can build relationships without time and distance constraints, increasing their social circle. However, parents must still supervise their children to prevent them from engaging in inappropriate social interactions. 2) Children can easily find and understand the latest information, provided it has been filtered to suit their needs and developmental stage. 3) Children can broaden their horizons, although parents should initiate the information-seeking process and share it with their children. 4) Children can acquire basic knowledge such as reading, writing, and arithmetic through the use of software. This makes learning more engaging, less monotonous, and easier to understand. Other positive impacts of digital technology include faster and easier access to information (Hadi & Sumardi, 2023), simplified tasks (Masrurin, 2021), and an expanding knowledge base for society due to the presence of digital media (Aslan, 2019).

Meanwhile, the negative impacts of digital media on young children include: 1) health problems, 2) developmental delays, 3) vulnerability to crime, and 4) behavioral changes (Asmawati, 2021). Additionally, excessive gadget use in children can pose risks to their mental health, such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), characterized by a lack of focus and difficulty controlling behavior (Purwati, 2022). Another negative impact of excessive gadget addiction is the disruption of motor skills development. Children may struggle to develop their motor skills and communication abilities due to prolonged screen time (Purwanza et al., 2022).

Tabel 1. Results of the Digital Message Impact Questionnaire

Principles of Digital Parenting	Indicators	Response (%)	
		Agree	Disagree
Digital Message Impact	My child becomes creative due to playing with gadgets	37	63
	My child continues to use gadgets even when with friends	17	83
	My child appears restless when they do not use gadgets in a day	43	57
	I am able to find activities that distract my child from gadgets	77	23
	My child prefers playing with siblings over using gadgets	80	20
	I provide books at home as an alternative to using gadgets	97	3
	I seek knowledge about parenting in the millennial era	94	6
	In my opinion, it is indeed time for children to be given gadgets according to current developments	31	69

The data indicates that digital content accessible to children significantly influences users' perspectives and thought patterns. A substantial 63% of parents reported a decline in their children's creativity due to excessive gadget use, although gadget use did not appear to negatively impact children's social interactions. Conversely, 77% of parents claimed to have found alternative activities to divert their children's attention from gadgets, such as providing reading materials. Moreover, a majority of parents sought knowledge about parenting in the digital age.

This preceding data are completed by in-depth interviews that were conducted with parents of preschool children in Parepare. Results revealed that parents employed various strategies to educate and protect their children in the digital era, including: accompanying children during gadget use, providing clear guidelines for digital device and media usage, understanding the information provided by digital media, balancing digital screen time with real-world interactions, lending digital devices based on specific needs, selecting positive programs and applications, fostering increased parent-child interaction, using digital devices judiciously, and monitoring children's online activities. Common child activities while using gadgets included watching children's songs and short videos on YouTube, playing online games, watching cartoons, and engaging in educational games. Regarding usage duration, 40% of parents reported less than an hour of daily gadget use, 58% reported 2-3 hours, and approximately 2% reported more than 5 hours.

Based on the research findings, it is evident that parents play a pivotal role in child-

rearing, particularly in the age of technological advancement. Consequently, a variety of child protection strategies, implemented through digital parenting, are necessary. Parenting encompasses a series of decisions related to child socialization, including parental actions to foster children's responsibility and contribution as members of society (Elyana, 2020). To mitigate gadget addiction among young children, parents can employ several strategies, such as: 1) accompanying, guiding, and supervising children during gadget use, which may require creative approaches, including the "3T" principle (firm, steadfast, strict) (Mita Widiastiti & Sastra Agustika, 2020); Susilo & Dewi, 2018); 2) establishing agreements with children regarding gadget usage, such as limiting use to one hour per day and avoiding use before bedtime or during meals (Faizah et al., 2022; Yunita et al., 2021); 3) increasing outdoor activities, minimizing gadget use during playtime, and avoiding daily gadget provision (Ristica, 2019); and 4) engaging children in discussions about the content they access while using gadgets, enabling parents to guide children towards age-appropriate content (Ketut Sudarsana et al., 2019).

Effective parental guidance in the digital realm is crucial for balancing children's interactions with the real world, their environment, and stimulating their critical thinking. Therefore, parents should understand and implement digital parenting practices to ensure that children's use of digital devices is regulated through established parenting rules.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of digital parenting indicates that parents engaged digital parenting based on the principles of child digital upbringing, which consist of the principles of norms, the impact of digital technology, and the impact of digital messages. Some things parents can do for their children in digital parenting include: increasing and updating their understanding of the internet and gadgets, limiting children's time on gadgets and the internet, strictly prohibiting as soon as possible if there is anything inappropriate to watch, and establishing open two-way communication with children. The results of this study can be used as a reference for parents in child-rearing so that they can maximize the role of parents in educating and protecting children in the digital era.

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