

# Implementation of Digital Parenting and the Development of Disciplinary Behavior in Early Childhood

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## ABSTRACT

The rapid advancement of digital technology has reshaped early childhood interaction and learning patterns, making digital parenting an essential component in ensuring safe and educational device use. This study aims to describe the implementation of digital parenting and its influence on the disciplinary development of children aged five to six at TK Negeri Pembina Pontianak Selatan. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, involving five parents selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through observation, semi structured interviews, and documentation, and were analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing techniques. The findings reveal that digital parenting practices include direct and application-assisted supervision, structured restrictions on duration and content, and communicative accompaniment through reflective dialogue and behavioral guidance. Children who received consistent support demonstrated stronger disciplinary tendencies, including improved time regulation, rule compliance, and smoother transitions between activities. The study concludes that digital parenting plays a significant role in shaping children's discipline in the digital age. Its contribution lies in providing contextual empirical insights into how digital parenting is practiced in Indonesia and how it informs educational and familial strategies for supporting early childhood development.

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## Introduction

The accelerated expansion of digital technologies over the past decade has reshaped the developmental landscape of early childhood in profound ways (Srisontisuk, 2019; Stephen & Edwards, 2015). Young children are increasingly exposed to digital screens, and this exposure often occurs during critical periods of cognitive, emotional, and social formation (Swider-Cios et al., 2023). Digital tools such as smartphones, tablets, and online platforms have introduced new modes of learning and engagement that can stimulate creativity and curiosity (Gkantia & Dinas, 2024; Karcher et al., 2022). However, empirical research has demonstrated that early and excessive screen exposure may also contribute to developmental vulnerabilities when not accompanied by adequate parental guidance. Prior studies have reported associations between unregulated digital use and difficulties in attention, emotional regulation, and behavioral adjustment, as well as increased susceptibility to inappropriate digital content that surpasses the child's developmental boundaries (Chen & Adler, 2019; Panjeti-Madan & Ranganathan, 2023; Stiglic & Viner, 2019). These findings underscore the importance of examining how young children encounter digital media within the broader ecology of family life.

In response to rising concerns and shifting patterns of digital engagement, the concept of digital parenting has become increasingly central in contemporary developmental discourse. Digital parenting refers to a range of parental practices that involve active monitoring, the establishment of clear usage boundaries, and collaborative participation in children's digital activities. Modecki and colleagues (2022) argue that digital parenting encompasses regulatory and relational dimensions that guide children toward safe, meaningful, and developmentally supportive interactions with technology. Such parental mediation strategies have been shown to influence children's socialization processes by shaping expectations, routines, and behavioral norms within the home environment. Moreover, studies highlight that structured mediation, including rule setting and discussions about digital content, is associated with stronger self-regulatory abilities and more adaptive behavioral outcomes among young children (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007; Muppalla et al., 2023). These findings suggest that digital parenting serves not only as a protective mechanism but also as an educational framework that supports healthy character development.

The cultivation of disciplinary behavior is a developmental aim of considerable significance during early childhood. Discipline refers to a child's capacity to follow agreed-upon rules, manage impulses, and participate in daily routines with increasing autonomy. According to Diamond (2013), the development of executive functions including inhibitory control, working memory, and cognitive flexibility provides the cognitive foundation for disciplined behavior. These executive processes are shaped through consistent experiences that require children to modulate their responses and adhere to structured expectations. In the context of digital technology, parental practices that define

appropriate usage times, designate technology free intervals, and encourage reflective engagement may contribute directly to strengthening children's regulatory capacities. Complementary research in the field of parenting has shown that structured guidance promotes children's understanding of consequences, persistence in tasks, and awareness of interpersonal boundaries, all of which form essential components of disciplined conduct (Fitri et al., 2020; Iskandar et al., 2022).

Despite the growing body of research on children's digital engagement, notable gaps remain in understanding how digital parenting is practiced in diverse sociocultural settings. Many previous studies have focused primarily on the risks of excessive screen time or the content children consume, while fewer have closely examined the integrated relationship between parental monitoring, restrictive strategies, and active accompaniment and the manifestation of children's disciplinary behavior. This gap is particularly evident in the Indonesian context, where technological access continues to increase and families must navigate complex digital environments with varying levels of literacy and support. Although research on parental control applications such as Google Family Link and YouTube Kids is emerging, much of the literature emphasizes technical descriptions rather than exploring how these tools interact with parental values, communication styles, and the developmental needs of children (Mukarromah et al., 2023; Pinariya & Lemona, 2019). As a result, there remains limited empirical evidence explaining how digital parenting is meaningfully enacted within Indonesian early childhood settings.

This study aims to address the identified gap by providing an in depth description of digital parenting practices and their influence on the development of disciplinary behavior among children aged five to six years at TK Negeri Pembina. Through an integration of observational data, semi structured interviews, and documentation, the study explores how parents supervise digital usage, establish limits that align with developmental expectations, and support children through guided interactions with digital content. The findings are expected to contribute both conceptually and practically to the literature on digital parenting by offering insights into how families negotiate digital demands while fostering disciplined behaviors during early childhood. Furthermore, this research seeks to inform educational practitioners and policymakers about the significance of supportive partnerships between schools and families in cultivating healthy and balanced digital habits among young learners.

## Methods

This study was conducted at TK Negeri Pembina Pontianak Selatan, an early childhood education setting that provides a natural context for examining how parents implement digital parenting in daily life. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed to obtain a deep understanding of digital parenting practices, consistent with Nasution's

(2023) view that qualitative research positions the researcher as the main instrument for interpreting participants' meanings and experiences. The descriptive design was selected to systematically portray the phenomenon without manipulating variables, as emphasized by Sugiyono (2019, 2023). Five parents were selected through purposive sampling based on their active involvement in guiding their children's digital device use.

Data were collected through observation, semi structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted both at home and in the school environment to capture parents' supervisory practices, forms of restriction, and types of accompaniment provided during children's engagement with digital devices. Semi structured interviews offered flexibility for participants to describe their experiences while maintaining a structured inquiry process. Documentation, including screenshots of parental control settings, device usage schedules, and children's activity logs, served to corroborate and enrich the data. The observational guide incorporated four qualitative developmental categories of disciplinary behavior: Not Yet Developed, Beginning to Develop, Developing as Expected, and Developing Very Well, functioning strictly as descriptive indicators rather than quantitative measures.

Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (Miles et al., 2014) interactive model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data reduction, information from interviews, observations, and documentation was coded and organized to identify emerging patterns. The data display process utilized narrative summaries and thematic matrices to facilitate interpretation. Conclusions were drawn continuously throughout analysis to ensure alignment between the data and emerging insights. To enhance trustworthiness, source and technique triangulation was applied by comparing findings from multiple data collection methods, and member checking was conducted to validate interpretations with participants. These procedures strengthened the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the study within its qualitative framework.

## **Result**

This section presents the key findings of the study based on the analysis of observational records, semi structured interviews, and documentation. The results are organized according to the primary focuses of the research, namely (1) parental supervision in digital parenting, (2) parental restriction of device use, (3) parental accompaniment during children's digital engagement, and (4) the developmental tendencies of children's disciplinary behavior. All findings are reported objectively without theoretical interpretation, in order to portray the empirical conditions observed in the field.

## 1. Parental Supervision in Digital Parenting

The data reveal that all participating parents demonstrated active involvement in supervising their children's use of digital devices. Two forms of supervision emerged consistently: direct supervision and indirect supervision aided by parental control applications. Direct supervision was characterized by parents positioning themselves near the child, monitoring reactions, selecting appropriate content, and providing immediate verbal guidance. One parent stated, *"I always sit beside my child while she watches YouTube because I want to know exactly what she sees and explain anything that may not be suitable."*

Indirect supervision occurred through the use of YouTube Kids and Google Family Link, which enabled parents to track viewing history, restrict certain features, block inappropriate content, and regulate screen time. Documentation collected from parental devices showed evidence of automated settings that prevented children from accessing undesired material. Observational notes indicated that children tended to follow rules more consistently when such supervision was performed continuously.

**Table 1.** Forms of Parental Supervision Identified in the Study

Type of Supervision	Description of Findings
Direct supervision	Parents accompany children, guide content selection, and observe behavioral responses during use.
Application-based supervision	Use of YouTube Kids and Google Family Link to filter content and monitor duration.
Monitoring of usage history	Parents regularly review viewing logs and app activity.
Dialogic supervision	Parents discuss expectations and rules before and after device use.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that supervision is not limited to the technical regulation of devices but also involves continuous interactive engagement between parents and their children.

## 2. Parental Restriction of Digital Device Use

Restriction emerged as a prominent component of digital parenting. All parents established clear limitations regarding both the duration and content of digital device use. Daily screen time limits ranged from two to five hours, depending on the child's activities and readiness to follow established routines. Some parents relied on alarms or built-in timers to signal the end of permitted usage. According to one parent, *"When the time is up, the phone locks automatically through Family Link, so my child knows the session is finished."*

Restriction was also applied in relation to specific contexts. Parents consistently prohibited device use during mealtimes, study periods, religious activities, family gatherings, or when guests were present. In terms of content, children were allowed to access only educational or age-appropriate videos such as Upin Ipin, Nusa Rara, and other curated children's programs. Offline modes were frequently utilized to ensure controlled access.

**Table 2.** Forms of Restriction Applied by Parents

Restriction Aspect	Findings
Duration limits	Daily limits of 2–5 hours depending on circumstances.
Content filters	Only educational or child-friendly content allowed; offline videos frequently prepared.
Situational restrictions	Prohibition during meals, study time, family routines, or social interactions.
Automatic device lock	Google Family Link used to lock devices when time limits are exceeded.

The findings indicate that restriction is implemented not only as a set of rules but also as a structural routine embedded in children's daily lives.

### 3. Parental Accompaniment During Digital Engagement

Accompaniment was conducted in both direct and indirect forms. Direct accompaniment involved parents being physically present, observing children's reactions, and answering questions that arose during digital usage. Indirect accompaniment took the form of reflective conversations, in which parents asked children about what they watched and encouraged them to articulate thoughts or lessons learned. One parent expressed, *"I always ask what she learned after watching something. If I notice anything inappropriate, I explain why it should not be copied."*

Documentation records showed that several parents maintained lists of approved content, schedules of device use, and notes from daily interactions. This illustrated a consistent effort to foster emotional presence and cognitive guidance, rather than allowing children to engage passively with digital media. Observational data also indicated that accompaniment contributed to smoother transitions as children shifted from digital activities to non-digital tasks.

### 4. Developmental Tendencies of Children's Disciplinary Behavior

Based on observational indicators, children demonstrated varying degrees of disciplinary development categorized into Not Yet Developed, Beginning to Develop, Developing as Expected, and Developing Very Well. These categories served as qualitative descriptors to identify behavioral tendencies rather than quantitative scores.

**Table 3.** Categories of Disciplinary Behavior Development

Category	Meaning	Field Findings
NYD	Not Yet Developed	Children have difficulty following rules or stopping device use without resistance.
BtD	Beginning to Develop	Children understand rules but require frequent reminders and guidance.
BaE	Developing as Expected	Children follow rules with minimal prompting and show increasing self-control.
DVW	Developing Very Well	Children independently regulate usage time, transition without protest, and demonstrate strong awareness of rules.

## Discussion

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive picture of how digital parenting practices are enacted by parents of young children and reveal the multi-layered nature of parental mediation in contemporary digital environments. The interplay between direct supervision, application-assisted monitoring, structured restriction, and reflective accompaniment demonstrates that parents function simultaneously as guardians, facilitators, and interpreters of the digital world for their children. In connecting these findings to broader theoretical perspectives, it becomes evident that digital parenting is not merely a set of technical measures but a relational and pedagogical practice embedded within the daily dynamics of family life. Modecki et al. (2022) highlight the multidimensional character of digital parenting, and the present study affirms this through empirical evidence that shows parents actively negotiating content, context, and communication in their effort to guide their children's digital engagement.

The structured restrictions observed in this study further illuminate how parents translate concerns about digital risks into routine-based management strategies. The establishment of time limits, contextual boundaries, and curated content reflects a conscious attempt to situate digital media within developmentally appropriate parameters. These practices resonate with the concerns raised by Stiglic and Viner (2019) and Chen and Adler (2019), who emphasize the need for controlled exposure to screen-based media to mitigate potential adverse developmental outcomes. Notably, parents in this study did not rely solely on time regulation; instead, they implemented situational rules and utilized offline modes to ensure continuity of control even in the absence of active supervision. This nuanced layering of restrictions underscores the adaptability of parents as they align digital engagement with the broader rhythms and values of family life.

Parental accompaniment emerged as a particularly significant component in shaping children's regulatory behaviors and in fostering an understanding of digital content. Through sustained dialogic engagement, parents transformed digital experiences into learning opportunities, guiding children not only in what to consume but in how to interpret and respond to it. This aligns with Diamond's (2013) assertion that self-regulation and executive functioning develop through guided interactions that prompt children to reflect, reason, and internalize behavioral expectations. In this study, accompaniment was characterized by emotional attunement and the intentional scaffolding of children's transitions from digital to non-digital activities, indicating that the presence of parents extended beyond supervision and became integral to the child's emerging disciplinary capacities. Such practices reveal that digital parenting is relationally grounded and pedagogically meaningful.

When examined in relation to the study's objectives, the findings indicate that digital parenting contributes to the development of children's disciplinary behavior in observable ways. Children who experienced consistent supervision, structured restrictions, and sustained accompaniment tended to demonstrate higher levels of self-regulation, as reflected in their placement within the Beginning to Develop to Developing as Expected categories, with several children exhibiting Developing Very Well behaviors. Although the qualitative nature of this study does not allow causal claims, the pattern reveals a compelling association between cohesive digital parenting practices and children's increasing ability to follow rules, manage transitions, and demonstrate responsibility. This provides a meaningful contribution to digital parenting scholarship, particularly within the Indonesian context, which remains underrepresented in global literature despite its rapidly expanding digital landscape.

The interpretation of these findings must, however, be considered in light of the study's methodological limitations. The use of purposive sampling involving five families limits the broader transferability of the conclusions, although such a sample is consistent with the depth-oriented aims of qualitative inquiry as articulated by Nasution (2023) and Sugiyono (Sugiyono, 2019, 2023). Additionally, the qualitative categories of disciplinary development function as descriptive indicators rather than standardized measures, thereby limiting their use for statistical comparison. A further limitation concerns the reliance on parental self-reporting, which may be influenced by social desirability biases or selective recall. These constraints do not diminish the value of the findings but highlight the need for continued research that builds upon and refines the present insights.

Drawing upon both the strengths and limitations of the study, several implications and directions for future research emerge. Practically, the findings suggest that schools and educational agencies can play a pivotal role in designing digital parenting programs that integrate technical training on parental control tools with guidance on communication strategies that support children's emotional and cognitive development. Future research may benefit from adopting mixed-methods designs that incorporate validated quantitative instruments to complement qualitative insights, thereby enhancing the robustness of findings. Comparative studies across diverse socioeconomic and cultural contexts would also deepen understanding of how digital parenting practices vary and what contextual factors shape their effectiveness. In sum, this study contributes to an evolving body of knowledge by demonstrating that digital parenting, when enacted consistently and thoughtfully, holds substantial potential to support children's disciplinary development in the digital era.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that digital parenting practices, encompassing both direct and application-assisted supervision, structured restrictions on duration and content, and sustained communicative accompaniment, play a meaningful role in fostering the disciplinary development of children aged five to six, as reflected in their growing ability to regulate screen use, comply with established rules, and transition effectively between digital and non-digital activities. These results suggest that digital parenting serves not only as a protective mechanism against technological risks but also as an educational medium through which self-regulation and constructive habits are cultivated during early childhood. Accordingly, parents are encouraged to enhance their reflective communication and consistent engagement, while schools are advised to strengthen collaborative initiatives with families through targeted digital literacy programs. Future research would benefit from employing mixed-methods designs or broader samples to explore causal relationships more rigorously and to deepen understanding of how digital parenting practices vary across different social and cultural settings.

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