PARENTAL NAVIGATION IN THE PRESCHOOLERS' DIGITAL WORLD

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Abstract

Parenting requires a different kind of hard work, and it now includes managing the child's exposure to technology, especially with the advent of countless digital devices. The work reported here examines the approaches and perceptions of parents in managing their young children's engagement with digital media. This study uses interviews with parents of preschoolers to explore the challenges, concerns and adaptations that parents conceive as they navigate their children through the digital environment. This qualitative study is anticipated to serve as an initial step into providing important knowledge related to parenting roles that enhance their children's digital literacy. The purpose of this study is to provide insights into responsible digital parenting by examining the different forms and motivations of parental decisions. Key areas of investigation will be parents' perceptions of the benefits and harms associated with digital media, how parents go about setting thresholds and limits and strategies that promote healthy digital behaviors. The purpose of this research is to guide parents focused on the improvement of the quality of the children's interaction with technologies at every stage of the child's development process.

Keywords: Parental navigation, Digital world, Preschoolers, Children's Digital Experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Technological advancement was brought into practice as part of human life. Technology has brought so many conveniences in every aspect and every category of age, ranging from childhood to adulthood. Currently, preschool children aged from 3 to 6 years are quite comfortable sharing their time with different devices such as smartphones, computers, and tablets. This essentially creates an entirely different problem for parents regarding child-rearing in the context of the new-age digital world.

In this context, the digital world refers to the environment created by information and communication technology, including the internet, apps, games, and other forms of digital media. In its report by 2022, the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association or APJII projected Indonesia's Internet usage saying that children are particularly avid Internet users with 77.02 % of the overall Indonesian population using the Internet actively. This data emphasizes the importance of a more in-depth understanding of the role of parents in managing preschoolers' digital experiences.

In this increasingly digitized era, technology's influence on preschool children's development is becoming increasingly significant. An equally important and challenging area that is emerging here is the attempts of parents to direct children's usage of such opportunities. According to Ebi (2017) to be in a family, families have to sustain the physical mode face to face and also have to balance the communication process. Parental navigation in the digital world of preschool children is a challenge and an integral part of establishing a balanced teaching environment.

The current research endeavors to explain the role of parents in managing their preschoolers to guide them through the adversities put forth by the digital world. Qualitative methods involving an in-depth interview, have been used to describe the experiences, views and strategies taken up by their parents. The aspects focused on were parents' roles in terms of boundary setting, choosing adequate content, and stimulating positive learning in the digital world. (Rusmianto & Putra, 2020).

The result is relevant not only for practical guidance to be given to the parents but also for the insight it will give regarding the dynamics of interaction between parents and children in the digital era. On the other hand, Rahimah (2021) points out that how parents adapt and manage preschoolers' experience with digital media bears significantly on children's cognitive, emotional, and social development.

This study is also expected to extend the literature on parenting in the digital era, particularly for Indonesian cases. While there are a fair number of studies related to children's use of technology, few are centered precisely on how parents manage digital experiences among preschoolers in Indonesia. The results of this study are expected to serve as a foundation for developing practical guides, educational programs, and resources that support parents in guiding their preschoolers through the challenges of an ever-evolving digital world (Miranda et al., 2022). Furthermore, this research aims to answer the main question: 'What strategies do Indonesians parents use daily to control and regulate young children in their early years use of technology?'.

The structure would include a literature review, an explanation of the methodology used in the research, a statement of the results, an analysis, a discussion of how such results link to already existing literature, and conclusions that highlight the implications for the research findings and make recommendations toward future research and parenting in the digital age.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Child guidance in relation to the digital environment has now become of interest since the introduction of IT in teaching and learning processes for young children. According to Istenič et al. (2023), there is social pressure found in society for children to participate in digital technologies, while on the other hand, there are health risks that recommend that preschool children should at most engage in the use of technologies. Therefore, they find that parents understand the dangers that come with the use of digital technology while knowing that the same technology can benefit learning, hence the ambivalent relationship that the present research establishes between parental attitudes and children's digital play.

Similarly, concerning the digital home context, Karabanov and Aram (2024) stress parents' engagement in choosing digital content and writing activities via smartphone. Their results show that parental supervision and education programs on digital technologies have a positive impact on children's early literacy skills, while unsupervised independence in the use of electronic gadgets restrains the children's literacy skills. This is why parents need to ensure that young people engage in technological activities while monitoring them.

Cumulatively, these works shed light on the complex task that parents perform in regulating their children's interactions with technology and call for a more active approach that integrates, on the one hand, learning about technology and, on the other, minimizing the dangers that come with using it. While more research is conducted in this area, knowledge of parents' navigation both in and out of the classroom will be key to designing relevant interventions and relevant policies in Early Childhood Education.

METHOD

Qualitative research is selected in the form of words and sentences or images as findings, facts, and research data. The qualitative method is the method chosen by researchers to conduct this research. This method includes the method that researchers use to provide solutions to a problem in research related to data that is included in a narrative by means of observation, interviews, and extracting documents (Wahidmurni, 2017). Miles & Huberman (Sugiyono, 2017) suggest that activities in qualitative data analysis are carried out interactively and take place continuously until completion so that the data is saturated; these activities are data reduction, data presentation and data verification. So, in this study, researchers used data analysis techniques, namely the Miles & Huberman model, which included the stages of data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

1.1. Sample

A Participants were purposefully selected to obtain a diverse pool of one hundred parents or guardians with preschool-age children (aged 3-6 years) who report using digital technology regularly. Owing to its generalization, this strategy was designed to cover a wider spectrum of practitioners' viewpoints and employability experiences.

To qualify for participation, individuals were required to meet the following criteria:

- Primary Caregiver: To be eligible to participate, participants must be at least 18 years old for the child, and their sole caregiver (biological mother or father, or legal guardian) of the child under 6 years of age.
- Active Technology Use: Parents need to employ a digital device daily in their interactions with a child, which may be a smartphone, a tablet, or a computer. This comprises such tasks as game playing, video viewing, or app use that may include teaching.
- Geographic Diversity: Subjects were selected across the regions of Tegal to get a broad spread because the usage of technology might differ from 1 area to another, together with sourcing for food for daycare children.
- Socioeconomic Diversity: They ensured that participants came from different sectors of society in terms of their education level, income and occupation. This was part of attempts to minimize bias and generalize effects across a population of interest.

This paper uses descriptive qualitative case study research to analyze the role played by parents in regulating the use of digital devices by their preschool children. This means that the approach is particularly useful in studying complex phenomena in its natural setting (Yin, 2018). Exploring the case studies can provide a detailed picture of the multiple determinants that shape parental behavior and its repercussions on early child development.

1.2. Data Collection Methods

This study used a qualitative approach, combining several data collection methods, to explore in depth the experiences and perspectives of parents in managing the use of technology in early childhood.

1.2.1. Interviews

According to Saroso (2017) interviews are one of the most widely used tools for collecting qualitative research data. Interviews allow researchers to collect diverse data from respondents in various situations and contexts. However, interviews need to be used with caution and need to be triangulated with data from other sources. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with each participant, providing a platform for in-depth discussions. The interviews delved into a wide range of topics, including how parents introduced technology to their children, the challenges they encountered, and the strategies they employed to manage screen time. Open-ended questions were used to encourage participants to share their experiences candidly and provide detailed insights.

1.2.2. Observations:
Observation is a fundamental method in all scientific disciplines. The work of scientists is based on data, that is, on facts obtained through observation. Through observation, investigators gain insight into behavior and the meanings associated with it (Nasution, 2018). To gain a deeper understanding of the context in which technology is used within families, observations were conducted in participants' homes and schools. These observations focused on the interactions between parents and children with digital devices, capturing the nuances of their behavior and the environmental factors that influence their technology use. Field notes were meticulously maintained to record detailed observations and contextual information, providing a rich source of data for analysis.

1.2.3. Documentation:
Documentation is a complement to the use of observation and interview methods in qualitative research. Documentation study is to collect documents and data needed in research problems and then examine them intensely so that they support and add to the trust and proof of an event (Slamet, 2019). To ensure accurate transcription and analysis, all interviews and observations were audio-recorded. This allowed for a detailed examination of the verbal exchanges and non-verbal cues during interactions, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives and experiences.

1.3. Data Analysis
The implementation of data analysis in qualitative research is carried out by systematically searching and compiling what is obtained by organizing, describing, synthesizing, compiling patterns, selecting what is important, and drawing conclusions about field data (Saleh, 2017). A rigorous content analysis approach was employed to extract meaningful insights from the qualitative data collected through interviews and observations. This involved systematically identifying, coding, and categorizing key themes and patterns within the data. By meticulously examining the textual and observational data, we were able to construct a comprehensive understanding of parents' roles, strategies, and challenges in navigating their children's digital experiences.

1.3.1. Coding Framework
A coding framework was developed to guide the analysis process. This framework included a set of predetermined codes such as parental concerns, digital literacy, screen time management, content selection and parental support. Parental concerns is a situasi focus on reflected parents' anxieties about the potential negative impacts of technology on their children's development. Digital Literacy encompasses parents' efforts to educate their children about responsible technology use and online safety (Tosun & Mihci, 2020). Screen Time Management represents parents' strategies for limiting screen time and establishing healthy boundaries (Neville et al., 2021). Content Selection is focused on parents' approaches to choosing appropriate and age-appropriate digital content. Lastly is Parental Support which highlighted the role of parents in providing guidance, supervision, and active engagement with their children's digital activities.

1.3.2. Intercoder Reliability
Intercoder reliability is very important in qualitative research, especially in content analysis, for the purpose of ensuring that the coding decision made is correct. It assesses reliability in a situation where several coders are in the process of applying codes to textual information. Intercoder reliability, therefore, refers to the procedure of coding a portion of data by two or more analysts and reconciling any differences. Scholars have proposed different approaches to estimating intercoder reliability; these are the predetermined text segment level and the free text data level. The following guidelines and recommendations should be adopted to enhance intercoder reliability: The study should meet

recommended standards in the use of the Coders' Manual, the software used in coding needs to be suitable to the task, and the complexity of the study context should not be overlooked. You may also determine intercoder reliability when coders analyze the same television show, and this can be properly assessed and reported in order to provide credibility to qualitative insights (MacPhail et al., 2016).

1.3.3. Theme Identification

In qualitative research, the theme is defined in terms of the processes that are identified through the analysis of raw data. These processes may be inductive or deductive in nature and are capable of generating patterns from the data. With inductive coding, the themes are derived from the collected data, while with deductive codebook, there is the use of categories arising from theoretical frameworks. Given this, the approach brings a modicum of flexibility when approaching patterns of research and can also provide structure as to how to interpret and categorize findings (Williams & Moser, 2019). It entails many steps of data encoding, sorting into categories and themes, and constructing the sense of analyzing the collected data. The comparison of what inductive and deductive aim at can be made easier to understand when we have a comparison that shows the comparison between them by coming up with a study on childhood vaccination barriers. Although inductive categories can capture and classify the data more effectively and distinctively, deductive domains can also reveal further research foci (Bonner et al., 2021). It is for this reason that a composite approach is used in order to investigate the themes adequately and to enhance the overall understanding of research phenomena.

1.3.4. Thematic Analysis

A detailed review of the literature has utilized thematic analysis to describe and establish parental mediation approaches regarding children's digital technologies. According to Reginasari et al. (2021) and Nichols & Selim (2022), researchers have pinpointed the following: restrictive mediation, guidance, trust space, and direct intervention. This paper points out that parental mediation is a co constructed process that depends on such factors as the child's age, gender, and needs for protection, as well as parents' knowledge of ICT. Parents use both primary and secondary preventive measures to get the most yield out of social media and the least hazard. The parental experience is characterized by trust and anxiety, and its mediation strategies are more and less distinct. Drawing on geography, mediation is also differentiated between urban and rural contexts, and the range of risks has likewise been broadened to include health risks, social risks, and risks related to parents becoming anxious (Meehan and Hickey, 2016). These findings can be used as guidance for psychologists, counselors, and psychotherapists practicing with parents and families who are managing the digital parenting experience.

1.4. Etchical Considerations

Ethical problems are always important in conducting research with more emphasis on sensitive topics like sexual health. These are informing participants of their rights regarding their privacy, anonymity, and the rights of any vulnerable participants (A&E, 2022; Shirmohammadi et al., 2018). Scientists also have duties in relation to the proper, legal, and moral modes and manners by which the potential affecting harm to the agents of participation can be limited. Informed consent should be obtained from related bodies such as the ethical committee, and an adequate description of the study should be given to participants regarding the study (Yusuf et al., 2022). The handling of data must be done securely and with a large regard given to third-party privacy, and Personally Identifiable Information should not be used in analysis or reports. Pre-scripted consent forms should facilitate voluntary participation. As is apparent in many studies, there may be some considerations required in sexual health research because of the context of the study (Shirmohammadi et al., 2018). In general, every study should embrace the continual adoption of ethical AVs in order to prevent harm and maintain the credibility of the study.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Parents' views and attitudes

This study revealed a nuanced understanding of parents' views and attitudes toward digital technology in early childhood. Past literature reviews have examined parents' perceptions of the use and integration of digital technology in the early years of a child's learning. Despite the fact that some parents exhibit positive attitudes and recognize the benefits of digital technologies (Wan Zakaria et al., 2022), some parents exhibit concerns and anxiety concerning the use of technology. Parental beliefs and attitudes depend on a child's gender, parent's gender, type of school, and income (Ekici, 2016). Somewhat surprisingly, parents' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of digital technology were not influenced by family monthly income in one research. It has been noted that the parents have a different attitude toward play compared to the teachers, where the latter favor traditional play and psycho-motor activities as opposed to digital technologies (Gjelaj et al., 2020). High levels of digital device ownership among parents do not translate into computer or information literacy among children, as noted by Preradovic et al. (2016). However, these insights stress further collaboration of parents and teachers to achieve the desirably maximal effective and minimal potential harm bestowed by information and computing technologies in the course of young children's learning.

Positive Attitudes

According to a study, parents feel that the use of digital technology in child development and learning is mostly appropriate. In this case, parents have trust in technology, which leads to the development of acumen and interaction skills, as well as academic skills (Jabbar et al., 2019). Parents are satisfied with technology-supported homework and consider it possible to use it in the rehabilitation of children with multiple disabilities (Apps et al., 2024). Among children, smartphones are pointed out as the most used and effective devices. However, the attitude differs; some parents embrace traditional play and activities to develop psychomotor skills (Gjelaj et al., 2020). Issues of physical health hazards posed by technology use are also mentioned. Parents with positive media attitudes and better literacy on technology have a positive perception of technology-supported learning than the other parents (Griffith et al., 2023). In general, the findings of the present research indicate that there should be an equally appropriate utilization of technology in the learning and development of children.

Mixed Attitudes

The study shows that parents have ambivalent perceptions about the benefits and the negative effects of ICT on children. Most parents endorse the use of digital media for learning, and they agree that there is an opportunity for means of learning, communication and culture sharing (Mohamed et al., 2024). However, they also have some conflicts of interest in terms of worries over time spent on screen, potential exposure to wrong content, and possible effects on exercise and developmental gains. To manage the risks involved, parents put measures in place to restrict their children’s access to the technologies (Gür & Türel, 2022). Notably, while the parents of the young children believe in the use of computers, some of the teachers interviewed showed a preference for conventional play and psycho-motor engagements. Attitude patterns include parental education, income, and the ages of the children. In sum, parent across all networks want to embrace the positive effects of technology while at the same time guarding their children against dangers.

Parental Supervision as a Key Factor

It was sampled that parental supervision is a big factor that should be considered in children’s use of digital media. According to Livingstone et al. (2018), parents play an important part in regulating children’s use of the internet. From early childhood, parents adapt behaviors to regulate their children’s media use based on their parenting beliefs and cultural values. However, there are difficulties in

executing these approaches because of numerous organizational constraints and cultural implications that parents experience. In their qualitative study carried out for Kostyrka-Allchorne, Beltner, Cunningham, Staiano, & Salisbury (2017), the authors examined the parental mediation of contemporary media and established that parents manage digital technology in children's lives. According to Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020), technology presents affordances that encourage agency but also frame new risks and renegotiate parenting for values and authority. They point out that parents use memories regarding their childhood and future imagined scenarios and, therefore, choose the ways in which they incorporate this technology into child rearing, thus using it sometimes but not shunning it completely.

Impact of Parental Navigation on Preschoolers' Development

Parental involvement plays a critical role in children's cognitive, social and emotional development by managing and supervising their use of technology. As digital devices become more integrated into everyday life, parents need to help guide how their children interact with technology to maximize developmental benefits while mitigating potential risks.

Cognitive Development

Parental navigation in technology use has a significant influence on early childhood cognitive development. The choice of educational digital content can improve children's critical thinking, problem-solving and digital literacy skills. According to Sharpe (2021), the use of tool-based applications guided by parents is associated with an increase in children's learning abilities, compared to the use of entertainment-based applications without supervision. In addition, active supervision of technology use can help children utilize devices for educational purposes without the risk of excessive distraction.

Social Development

Parental navigation of technology is also important in building social skills in preschoolers. According to Mohamed et al. (2024), parent-guided technology use can help children understand social norms and improve their ability to communicate. In contrast, social interaction with peers and family members may decrease when technology is used freely and unsupervised. Another study by Gjelaj et al. (2020) suggests that active mediation by parents, for example, by playing digital games with children, can strengthen social skills through digitally designed cooperative activities.

Emotional Development

Technology not only has an impact on cognitive and social but also on children's emotional development. According to Neville et al. (2021), screen time restrictions implemented by parents can reduce the risk of technology addiction, which is often associated with anxiety and emotion regulation problems in children. Rahimah (2021) also emphasizes the importance of parents controlling technology content to ensure that children are only exposed to content that is appropriate and supports their emotional health. For example, content that is child-friendly and involves stories can help children understand their emotions better.

Balancing Benefit and Risks

A study by Gür and Türel (2022) shows that balanced technology navigation by parents helps children use technology productively while reducing the risk of exposure to age-inappropriate content. Parents who actively guide their children's use of technology - such as setting screen time rules, selecting educational apps and limiting access to social media - can create a healthy balance between online and offline activities.

Parents' Practices in Managing Technology

This study revealed various parental practices in managing children's digital experiences during early childhood. While some parents adopted a more restrictive approach, others took a more flexible stance.

Restrictive Approaches

A review of the literature shows that parents adopt different strategies to manage children's technology use and that restrictive mediation is common and used on young children. This approach has limitations in the extent, scope, and frequency of screen usage because of various negative effects (Sekarasih, 2016). Nonetheless, the results reveal that children perceive context-based restrictions (e.g., no phone at dinner time) more difficult to observe than activity-based rules (e.g., no specific application) (Hiniker et al., 2016). Fear of the impact of the media through the manner of thinking and regarding the risks that might be posed is directly related to the use of restrictive strategies by parents. Although restrictive mediation is more typical, studies point to a synergy of instructive and co-using models as being more useful for a child's upbringing. Moreover, during parenting time, children expect their parents to have similar rules regarding unplugging, so it is interpreted as the need to apply rational technology use in families.

Flexible Approaches

In contrast, other parents adopted a more flexible approach, allowing their children greater autonomy in their digital activities. These parents often believed that a balanced approach, incorporating both digital and offline experiences, was essential for healthy development. Flexible approaches are more directed at a condition where parents can be more flexible and allow children to use technology in several situations (Koskela et al., 2020).

Active Parental Involvement

The study found that parents actively engaged with their children's digital experiences reported more positive outcomes. Those who discussed content with their children participated in digital activities together, and modeled responsible technology use were more likely to foster healthy digital habits. This aligns with previous research highlighting the importance of active parental involvement in shaping children's digital media use (Nikken & Schools, 2015). Active parental involvement can influence how children use technology. Every parent who has an interest in participating will have a positive impact on their child, especially in controlling behavior using technology.

Challenges Faced by Parents

This study revealed various challenges parents face in navigating their children's digital experiences. These challenges can be broadly categorized into three main areas:

Understanding Technological Developments

Many parents expressed difficulty keeping up with the rapid pace of technological change. The constant emergence of new devices, apps, and platforms can make it overwhelming for parents to stay informed and ensure their children use technology safely and effectively. This lack of technological literacy can hinder their ability to provide adequate guidance and support. The development of technology makes some parents have difficulty understanding technological changes. This is a challenge that is felt by parents to be able to follow the developments that have occurred in the surrounding environment. Therefore, this is one of the challenges for parents to be able to.

Concerns Regarding Negative Impacts

Parents expressed concerns about the potential negative impacts of excessive technology on their children's development. These concerns included:

- Exposure to inappropriate content: Parents were worried about their children's exposure to age-inappropriate content, such as violence, sexually suggestive material, or harmful online behaviors. In this case, parents should be able to limit some inappropriate content that can affect children. Content restrictions are very necessary for children because of the need to supervise children. As it is known, inappropriate content is now easier to find through social media. In this situation, some restrictions and considerations from parents are needed to prevent negative impacts on the consumption of inappropriate content.
- Technology addiction: There were concerns about the risk of children becoming addicted to screens and neglecting other important activities, such as face-to-face interactions and physical activity. Addiction in using technology is one of the concerns because when a child is addicted, it will have a fatal impact on the child's future. A child who is addicted to technology will have difficulty focusing on completing work (Qiao & Liu, 2020).
- Negative impact on social interactions: Some parents worry that excessive technology use could hinder their children's social development by limiting face-to-face interactions and creating barriers to healthy relationships. Addiction in using technology will cause social interaction to decrease. In this case, the child has no interest in socializing. A child who prefers technology will find it difficult to interact socially and rarely go out of the house.

Balancing Technology Utilization and Other Activities

Parents often struggle to balance technology use and other important activities. They recognized the benefits of technology but also wanted to ensure their children were engaging in various experiences, including physical activity, outdoor play, and creative pursuits. Balance in the use of technology plays an important role in being able to provide control to children. Every parent must be able to control the use of technology in children to ensure that no child is addicted to technology. In this case, every parent must be able to understand the right time to give children technology.

Parents' Desire for Additional Information

Most parents wanted additional information on managing digital technology in early childhood. They are looking for resources and guidelines that can assist them in making better decisions regarding their children's use of technology (Yana, 2021). This study revealed that parents highly value practical and applicable information, such as age-appropriate guidelines for using specific technologies, strategies for setting effective boundaries and utilizing technology to support learning. This finding aligns with the research of Wartella et al. (2016), who emphasized the importance of accessible and relevant resources for parents in the digital age.

Recommendations for the Development of Education Policies and Programs

Most parents strongly desire additional information and resources to support their efforts in managing their children's digital experiences. This need for guidance reflects the challenges they face in navigating the complex landscape of technology and its potential impact on early childhood development.

Practical and Applicable Information

Parents sought information that was both practical and applicable to their specific circumstances. They were particularly interested in age-appropriate guidelines for using various digital devices and platforms, strategies for setting effective boundaries, and tips for utilizing technology to

support learning. This aligns with Yana's findings (2021), which emphasized providing parents with relevant and actionable information.

Accessible and Relevant Resources

The study highlighted the need for accessible and relevant resources that address parents' unique challenges and concerns in the digital age. This includes educational materials, online tools, and community support networks that can provide guidance and support. As Wartella et al. (2016) noted, the availability of such resources is crucial for empowering parents to make informed decisions about their children's technology use. This is in line with Unesco's (2019) recommendations on the importance of a multisectoral approach to building a digitally literate society.

CONCLUSION

This research has identified an urgent need for better support for parents in managing young children's use of technology. By providing adequate education, resources and community support, we can equip children with the digital skills necessary to thrive in an increasingly connected world. Further research could explore the long-term impact of different parenting approaches in digital contexts and develop more effective intervention programs for different age groups.

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