

Parenting Patterns and Digital Media: A Case Study of the Socialization Process and Character Formation of Children in Kindergarten

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Abstract

In the era of rapid digital transformation, digital media has permeated Indonesian family life, often functioning as a "digital babysitter" that disrupts early childhood socialization and character formation. This study analyzes how digital parenting patterns influence the socialization process and character development of children at Generasi Tanpa Batas Kindergarten, Takalar Regency. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach with a single case study design, data were collected over five days through participatory classroom observations, in-depth interviews with the principal, a classroom teacher, and four purposively selected parents, alongside documentation. Data were analyzed using an interactive model encompassing reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal three dominant digital parenting patterns with distinct developmental outcomes. First, permissive-digital parenting, characterized by excessive screen time, results in low frustration tolerance, verbal aggressiveness, and limited expressive vocabulary. Second, authoritarian-digital parenting, which imposes a total gadget ban, paradoxically triggers obsessive interest and hidden gadget use among children. Third, authoritative-digital parenting, involving limited screen time and active co-viewing, fosters optimal socialization, empathy, verbal conflict resolution, and an adaptive reflective habitus. The study concludes that without active parental mediation, digital media risks replacing crucial humane interactions necessary for primary socialization. Therefore, a structured, collaborative digital-literacy approach between families and early childhood education institutions is urgently needed to optimize children's socio-emotional development and character building in the digital age.

Keywords: Parenting, Digital Media, Child Socialization, Character Building, Early Childhood Education.

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INTRODUCTION

Ideally, parents' parenting patterns are the primary foundation of the socialization process in early childhood. The parenting theory developed by Baumrind (Santrock, 2021) classifies parenting into three main types: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. Authoritative parenting, characterized by a combination of emotional warmth and clear boundaries, is considered the most optimal, as it encourages children to develop into independent, responsible individuals with strong social competence (Pratiwi & Hastuti, 2022).

In the context of early childhood development (0-8 years), socialization is not merely a process of learning social values, but also the formation of character foundations such as empathy, honesty, discipline, and the ability to collaborate. Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development (Yusuf, 2021) asserts that direct social interaction between children, adults, and peers is the driving force behind children's cognitive and social-emotional development. A family environment rich in verbal interaction and modeled parental behavior is a primary prerequisite for optimal child growth and development. Direct interaction through role-play and storytelling, for example, has been empirically shown to improve early childhood language ability (Amal et al., 2019), as also found by Amri (2017), who showed that the role-play method significantly improves the communication ability, or expressive language, of kindergarten children. Other forms of symbolic play, such as pretend play, have also been identified as an important foundation for early childhood character development (Amri & Intisari, 2019).

The penetration of gadgets and digital media has fundamentally changed the landscape of parenting. Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (Statistik, 2022) more than 62% of children aged 5-12 in Indonesia have actively used the internet, with most of their first access occurring through their parents' gadgets. The Ministry of Communication and Informatics (2022) recorded that Indonesian toddlers' average screen time reaches 3-5 hours per day, far exceeding international recommendations. This phenomenon has been exacerbated by the increasing use of gadgets as a "digital babysitter" during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Fitriani & Khasanah, 2021).

At Generasi Tanpa Batas Kindergarten, this phenomenon manifests in a number of observed behaviors: children who show difficulty concentrating during group play activities, a tendency to imitate digital media content uncritically, and a weakening of verbal communication skills with peers. This low concentration ability in early childhood, caused by excessive digital stimulus exposure, is consistent with the findings of Juwita et al (2025), which emphasize the importance of structured intervention to maintain children's concentration ability. The gap between the positive potential and the negative impact of digital media is the core issue addressed in this article.

The urgency of this research lies in the pressing need to contextually map digital-media-related parenting practices at the early childhood education (PAUD) level in Takalar Regency. This article aims to: (1) describe the range of parenting patterns related to digital media use; and (2) analyze their impact on the socialization process and character formation of children through a series of

structured observations and interviews. Recommendations for parents and teachers on managing digital media wisely and responsibly are formulated as a practical implication of this research's findings.

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a single case study design. This approach was chosen because it allows an in-depth understanding of the complex phenomenon of interaction between parenting patterns, digital media, and children's socialization processes within the specific context of a single early childhood education (PAUD) institution, as recommended by Sugiyono (2021) and Creswell (Raco, 2022).

The depth of the single case study in this research is not defined by the length of the calendar span, but by the intensity of source triangulation (principal, teacher, parents, and students) and technique triangulation (observation, interviews, and documentation) carried out on the same case unit, namely Generasi Tanpa Batas Kindergarten. The five days of data collection were designed in layers to cover a variety of different contexts - classroom observation, interviews with school staff, and interviews with parents - so that the data obtained would complement and cross-verify one another. The researchers acknowledge that this duration is a methodological limitation in capturing the dynamics of children's character formation and socialization, which are inherently long-term processes. The findings in this article are therefore understood as a snapshot of conditions during the observation period, rather than a generalization of the longitudinal process of character development. Further research with a longer observation duration (at least 1-2 months) is recommended to confirm the consistency of digital parenting patterns and their long-term impact.

The research was conducted in May 2026 at Generasi Tanpa Batas Kindergarten, located in the North Galesong area, Takalar Regency, South Sulawesi. This site was purposively selected because it represents the demographic profile of a suburban-urban community where household access to digital devices and high-speed internet is ubiquitous, yet parental awareness and practices regarding digital literacy remain highly varied. Instead of employing a rigid, long-term longitudinal design, the fieldwork was structured as an intensive, multi-layered data collection process over a concentrated two-week period. This flexible yet rigorous timeframe allowed the researchers to seamlessly alternate between participatory classroom observations, in-depth interviews with educational staff, and contextual interviews with parents, thereby ensuring comprehensive data triangulation within the specific ecological setting of the school.

Data collection involved the following primary sources: (1) The Principal of Generasi Tanpa Batas Kindergarten (1 person), as a key informant on school policy and the institution's profile, (2) The classroom teacher (1 person), as a direct observer of children's social behavior and character within the school environment, (3) Parents of students (4 people), selected purposively based on variations in their pattern of digital media use at home: 2 parents in the "free permission" category, 1 in the "strict restriction" category, and 1 in the "structured

guidance" category, and (4) Students (15 children aged 4-6 years) as direct observation subjects.

Data triangulation was carried out through three techniques: (1) participatory observation of classroom learning activities and free play time, focusing on children's social behavior, communication patterns, and responses to conflict; (2) semi-structured in-depth interviews with the principal, teacher, and parents; and (3) documentation in the form of daily field notes, activity photographs, and school profile documents. Data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (Rijali, 2022), which includes the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing.

To clarify the flow of mapping raw data into a classification of digital parenting patterns, the analysis process can be described as the following sequence of stages: interview transcripts and field notes as raw data; then coding of statements and behaviors into units of meaning related to digital media use (data reduction); then grouping the codes into three categories of digital parenting patterns - permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative (categorization); followed by developing themes on the impact of each pattern on children's socialization and character formation (data display); through to cross-category interpretation verified through member checking with the school (conclusion drawing). This flow confirms that the classification into three digital parenting patterns is the result of systematic data reduction, rather than an a priori categorization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

General Overview of the Research Location

Generasi Tanpa Batas Kindergarten was established in 2015 and currently serves 35 students divided into two classes. The school is located in the North Galesong area of Takalar Regency, a semi-urban coastal region where most parents work as private employees, entrepreneurs, fishermen, and civil servants. School facilities include simple classrooms, an outdoor play area, and a mini library. The learning model applied still relies heavily on a conventional, teacher-centered approach, which is generally the case in kindergartens across Makassar and its surrounding regencies (Hajerah & Syamsuardi, 2020). Consequently, digital literacy has not yet been formally incorporated into the school's curriculum.

Despite the conventional school environment, the digital penetration in the students' homes is profound. Nearly all families possess at least two smartphones, and affordable mobile data packages have made internet access ubiquitous. Most children were already familiar with YouTube, TikTok, and various streaming platforms before even entering kindergarten. This stark contrast between the school's analog environment and the children's highly digital home environments creates a complex ecological dynamic that significantly influences their daily behavior and social interactions.

Description of Digital Parenting Pattern Types

Overall, classroom observations revealed a concerning trend regarding attention spans. Of the 15 students observed, 7 children (47%) had difficulty maintaining focus for more than five minutes during group sitting activities without

a visual screen stimulus. Some appeared restless, fidgeting, and repeatedly looked for a gadget when the teacher told stories using conventional picture media. The classroom teacher, Mrs. Rugaiyah, confirmed that over the past three years she has observed a general decline in children's concentration abilities. She noted a striking phenomenon: "Some children remember the names and catchphrases of YouTube characters much better than the names of their own classmates."

Furthermore, the principal stated that Generasi Tanpa Batas Kindergarten does not yet have an official policy on digital media use. Although monthly parent meetings are held, the topic of digital literacy has never been specifically raised. These classroom findings form the general context underlying the three digital parenting patterns identified through in-depth interviews with parents, which were re-confirmed with the school through member checking.

Permissive-Digital Parenting

Two parents fall into this category, allowing their children to access gadgets from the age of two as a "soother" or "digital babysitter," with almost no time limits, averaging 4-6 hours of screen time per day. One parent rationalized this by stating, "Rather than her asking to go out and play and being at risk on the street, I just give her the phone. She's calm, and I can also work." This reflects the use of gadgets as a short-term parenting strategy driven by economic and occupational pressures, without any accompanying discussion or mediation regarding the content being watched. The content consumed generally consists of fast-paced animated videos, online games, and unfiltered YouTube content.

Observations showed that children from this pattern experience severe difficulty maintaining attention without a screen. Socially, they exhibit high verbal aggressiveness and low frustration tolerance when having to wait their turn, often resorting to hitting or screaming. Cognitively, they show a tendency to redraw animated characters rather than objects from the real environment, and their expressive vocabulary is noticeably limited, often restricted to mimicking sounds from videos. This aligns with the findings of Nadia et al., (2025), who emphasize that permissive parenting patterns negatively influence early childhood expressive language development. Furthermore, this corroborates the results of Fitriani & Khasanah (2021), who found a strong correlation between excessive, unmediated screen time and a significant decline in early childhood social-emotional abilities.

Authoritarian-Digital Parenting

In contrast, parents in this category impose an almost total ban on gadget use, citing moral and cognitive protection. One parent asserted, "Phones have no benefit for small children. I won't give her one until she's in elementary school." While the intention is positive and rooted in a desire to protect the child's innocence, the absence of structured alternative stimulation creates a paradoxical psychological effect.

Based on cross-verification with the classroom teacher, children from this category actually show an obsessive, almost forbidden-fruit interest in gadgets at school. When peers bring toys related to digital characters, these children hover around them intensely. Some have even been caught hiding their gadget use

from their parents when visiting relatives. Instead of engaging in physical play, they often wander aimlessly or stare blankly when deprived of both screens and structured physical activities. Wahyuni and Nurhayati (2023) warn that a total ban without accompanying digital literacy education actually increases the appeal of digital media. By failing to teach self-regulation, authoritarian-digital parenting leaves children vulnerable to digital temptation the moment they gain independent access.

Authoritative-Digital Parenting

Parents in this category apply the most balanced and developmentally appropriate approach. They limit screen time to 1-2 hours per day, carefully choose content together with the child, and make gadget use an interactive family moment rather than an isolating activity. One parent explained their routine: "We watch together, then I ask what she learned. Sometimes we practice it directly, like counting or drawing what we saw."

Children from this category consistently show superior socialization abilities. They demonstrate the capacity to share toys, wait their turn more patiently, and resolve conflicts through verbal negotiation rather than physical aggression. They can express their emotions verbally and show higher empathy towards peers. Interestingly, during drawing sessions, they draw more objects from the real environment (home, family, nature, local animals) compared to the permissive group's reliance on animated characters. This finding is strongly reinforced by Pratiwi & Hastuti (2022), whose research confirms that active, dialogic parental guidance is the strongest predictor of the positive impact of digital media on early childhood cognitive and social development.

Sociological and Anthropological Analysis

To understand the deeper implications of these empirical findings, this study analyzes the data through three foundational sociological and anthropological theories.

Bourdieu's Habitus Theory Perspective

The findings can be profoundly examined using Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (Haryatmoko, 2022). Habitus refers to the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that we possess due to our life experiences and social environments. Children accustomed to permissive-digital parenting are forming a *digital habitus*: an embodied tendency to resolve boredom, discomfort, or social friction through immediate access to digital media. This habitus is physically manifested in their restlessness when disconnected from screens and their reflexive expectation of instant gratification.

Conversely, children from authoritative-digital parenting develop a more adaptive and reflective *digital habitus*. They possess the ability to enjoy digital content while simultaneously understanding the limits of its use and recognizing the value of offline interactions. In the context of the 21st century, this reflective habitus functions as a crucial form of *cultural capital*. Children who possess this capital are better equipped to navigate the digital world safely and are more prepared for the structured demands of formal schooling, highlighting how early

digital parenting directly impacts a child's future social mobility and academic readiness.

Berger and Luckmann's Primary Socialization Theory Perspective

Berger and Luckmann (Wirawan, 2021) assert that primary socialization within the family is the foundational process for the construction of an individual's social reality. It is through significant others (parents) that the child internalizes the norms, values, and scripts of their society. However, when digital media becomes the dominant intermediary in family life, it actively participates in constructing the child's social reality, often bypassing parental mediation.

The phenomenon observed in the classroom—where children remember YouTube characters better than their classmates' names—reflects a critical disruption in primary socialization. The "significant others" for these children are no longer just their parents or teachers, but digital content creators and algorithmic feeds. Consequently, the social scripts these children internalize are often derived from the aggressive, fast-paced, or individualistic behaviors modeled in unfiltered digital content, rather than the humane, empathetic interactions ideally fostered within the family. This indicates that without active parental intervention, the family is losing its primary role as the chief architect of the child's moral and social reality.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory Perspective

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Yusuf, 2021) views child development as the result of layered, complex interactions between the individual and various environmental systems. Digital media operates simultaneously across all these layers, making its impact pervasive. At the *microsystem* level (the immediate environments of family and school), there is a distinct clash: the home environment is saturated with screens, while the school environment is analog, causing cognitive dissonance and behavioral friction for the child.

At the *mesosystem* level (the interaction between microsystems), there is a weak link. The lack of communication between parents and teachers regarding digital habits means the child's two primary worlds are not synchronized. Furthermore, at the *exosystem* and *macrosystem* levels, children are indirectly affected by the business models of tech companies (which design addictive, autoplay algorithms) and the broader national digital infrastructure that prioritizes connectivity over digital safety.

Therefore, the implication of this ecological perspective is clear: intervention regarding the impact of digital media cannot be isolated to the family alone. It requires a synchronized, multi-layered approach involving school policy formulation, active parental mediation, and community-level digital literacy campaigns (Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association, 2022) to create a cohesive and supportive developmental ecosystem for the child.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that parents' digital parenting patterns exert a significant and multidimensional influence on children's socialization processes and character development at Generasi Tanpa Batas Kindergarten. Findings

derived from systematic classroom observations and in-depth interviews with the principal, teachers, and parents consistently reveal three dominant patterns of digital parenting, each with distinct impacts. Among these, authoritative digital parenting—characterized by balanced freedom and active parental guidance—emerges as the most effective approach in fostering positive socialization outcomes. The primary challenge, therefore, does not lie in digital technology itself, but in parents' limited readiness to function as competent mediators within the family's digital environment. Insufficient digital literacy may allow digital media to become a dominant agent of socialization, potentially replacing rather than complementing essential human interactions crucial for early childhood development. Accordingly, parents are encouraged to implement consistent screen-time regulations in line with recommendations from the Indonesian Pediatric Society, limiting usage to one hour on school days and two hours on weekends, complemented by active breaks such as physical play or reading. Additionally, digital media engagement should be accompanied by active discussion to enhance children's critical understanding. Participation in digital literacy-based parenting programs is also recommended to strengthen parental capacity in supporting children's developmental transitions. For teachers and schools, it is essential to establish clear written policies regarding digital media use for families, enhance teacher competence in interactive and contextual learning design, and develop age-appropriate digital learning media. Furthermore, integrating digital literacy into the early childhood curriculum through creative play activities is crucial in helping children distinguish between positive and negative content from an early age. Finally, regular mapping of family digital media usage patterns is recommended to support more targeted and effective educational interventions.

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