Jupiter: Jurnal Pendidikan Terapan
Homepage : https://journal.diginus.id/jupiter/index
Email: jurnalpendidikanterapan@gmail.com

p-ISSN : 2985-3214; e-ISSN : 2964-3171
Jupiter, Vol. 4, No. 1, March 2026
Page 22-33

Beyond Screen Time: Content-Based Parental Decision Making in Early Childhood Digital Engagement- a Qualitative Study in Indonesia

Saharudin[1], Regita Riani Putri[2]
[1,2]Universitas Jambi, Jambi, Indonesia

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Submitted: March 18, 2026
Final Revised: March 25, 2026
Accepted: March 27, 2026
Published: March 30, 2026

Keywords:
Beyond Screen Time; Children's Digital Engagement; Content-Based Decision Making; Digital Parenting; Educational Media; Parental Mediation

ABSTRACT

Purpose: Research on children's digital media use has traditionally focused on screen time duration, overlooking the importance of content quality and parental decision-making. This study examines how parents make content-based decisions regarding children's digital media use, moving beyond traditional screen time perspectives. **Methods:** Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with six parents of early childhood children aged 2-6 years in a private kindergarten in Jambi and analyzed using thematic analysis. **Findings:** The findings reveal two main themes: content selection by parents and educational purposes of access. Parents actively curate children's digital environments by selecting age-appropriate, safe, and educational content, rather than focusing solely on limiting screen time. In addition, digital media are increasingly utilized as learning tools to support literacy, language development, and school-related learning. These findings indicate a shift in parental mediation practices toward a more intentional and content-oriented approach to digital parenting. **Research Implications:** The study contributes to the growing discourse on "beyond screen time" by emphasizing that the quality and purpose of digital media use are more significant than duration alone. It also highlights the critical role of parents as active facilitators of children's digital engagement. **Originality:** This study contributes by proposing a process-oriented understanding of content-based parental decision-making, highlighting how parents evaluate, filter, and guide children's digital media use beyond simple time regulation. The findings suggest that digital parenting is increasingly shaped by content quality and educational intent, emphasizing the role of parents as active facilitators in children's digital engagement.

Doi: https://doi.org/10.61255/jupiter.v4i1.876

INTRODUCTION

The constant growth of new digital technologies has changed the everyday experiences of children, with digital media now becoming a fundamental component of early childhood settings. The influence of smartphones, tablets, and digital platforms is growing on how children access informational, entertaining, and educational content. Consequently, children today encounter a wide range of digital content at an earlier age than previous generations (Babusabgari & Balakrishna, 2021). This shift has generated increasing academic interest in the ways families manage children's engagement with digital media, especially concerning the ways parents supervise, regulate, and provide guidance in the context of the home. Furthermore, digital parenting is one of the most difficult challenges that today's families encounter, requiring them to thoughtfully consider both the positive and negative aspects of their children's digital interactions (Lou et al., 2024). Digital technologies also offer opportunities for cognitive stimulation, creativity, and educational development when used appropriately. This duality highlights the complex role of digital media in children's development and underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of children's digital engagement beyond simply measuring time spent on screens.

The screen time concept has served as the predominant measure for assessing children's media actions, both in research and in public conversations about their family, health, safety and well-being, for years. International health organizations and policy guidelines have routinely recommended limiting children's daily screen time to mitigate

possible developmental risk. Although these guidelines serve a valuable role in giving parents and policymakers a practical overview, a growing body of literature suggests that limiting screen exposure to a certain amount oversimplifies the children-digital media equation. Scholars have suggested that the effect of digital media isn't determined primarily by how long it's used but rather other contextual factors, such as what type of content a child is accessing, at what point in its development and what might be engaging parent (Lafton et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024). As a result, screen-time-based approaches may overlook important variations in how digital media influences children's learning and well-being.

Recent research has increasingly emphasized that the quality of the content plays a critical role in determining whether children's media exposure will promote or hinder their development. Research on screen-based media impact emphasizes that not all forms of digital exposure have the same effects, while educational and interactive content may contribute to language growth, problem-solving skills and early learning (Swider-cios et al., 2023). In contrast, entertainment-oriented or poorly designed content may contribute little to cognitive development and may even produce negative behavioural outcomes (Guellai et al., 2022). Consequently, scholars have proposed shifting the analytical focus from screen time alone to content-based approaches, which consider what children actually do and learn during digital engagement. This perspective suggests that understanding the nature of digital content is essential for evaluating its educational value and developmental impact.

As the digital environment that children engage with continues to evolve, parents remain the primary influencers in leading and constraining children's interactions with digital media. Furthermore, strategies that involve the supervision, monitoring, and discussion of the children's media use have been described within the theoretical framework of parental mediation. Parent mediation theory recognizes a number of strategies, including restrictive mediation (setting specific guidelines on media use), active mediation (discussing and explaining the meaning of media messages), and co-use and co-viewing (watching media with children) (Nikken & Jansz, 2014). These strategies have been shown to influence children's media experiences and shape how they interpret digital content. However, the swift growth of algorithm-based digital platforms content has complicated parental decision-making. Parents now have to consider not only how much time children spend with digital media, but also what specific content children are interacting with (Blum-ross, 2018; Zhao et al., 2023).

Although the significance of the quality of digital content has been steadily increasing, much of the current research still focuses on regulatory strategies involving time limits, rather than understanding the role of parents in content-related decision-making regarding children's digital media use. Previous studies have explored parental mediation strategies broadly, yet relatively limited attention has been given to the decision-making processes parents use when selecting digital content for their children. Previous studies also have highlighted that parental mediation plays a crucial role in balancing the opportunities and risks of children's digital media use (Livingstone et al., 2017). Additionally, parents are increasingly viewing digital media as a positive resource for education, entertainment, social interaction, and the use of media as a risk (Livingstone and Blum-Ross, 2023). Understanding how parents evaluate digital content and how educational considerations influence children's digital engagement therefore remains an important yet underexplored area of research.

Addressing these gaps, this study examines content-based parental decision-making in children's digital engagement, moving beyond conventional screen-time frameworks. Specifically, the study investigates how parents select digital content for their children and how educational considerations shape children's access to digital media. By focusing on content selection by parents and the educational purposes of digital access, this research seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of digital parenting practices in contemporary families. In doing so, the study aims to provide insights into how parents balance the potential risks and benefits of digital media while supporting children's learning and development in an increasingly digital environment. Research on children's digital media use has traditionally emphasized the quantity of screen exposure and the regulatory role of parents in limiting screen time. However, relatively few studies have examined how parents make content-based decisions regarding their children's digital engagement, particularly in relation to educational motivations. As digital platforms increasingly offer diverse forms of content, understanding how parents evaluate, select, and justify digital media access becomes crucial for advancing research on digital parenting and children's learning in the digital age. Addressing these gaps, this study examines content-based parental decision-making in children's digital engagement, moving beyond conventional screen-time frameworks. Specifically, the study investigates how parents select digital content for their children and how educational considerations shape children's access to digital media.

Furthermore, this study aims to explore how parents make content-based decisions in children's digital media use, particularly in terms of how they select digital content and how educational considerations shape children's access to digital media. By focusing on content selection by parents and the educational purposes of digital access, this research seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of digital parenting practices in contemporary families.

In doing so, the study aims to provide insights into how parents balance the potential risks and benefits of digital media while supporting children's learning and development in an increasingly digital environment. Research on children's digital media use has traditionally emphasized the quantity of screen exposure and the regulatory role of parents in limiting screen time. However, relatively few studies have examined how parents make content-based decisions regarding their children's digital engagement, particularly in relation to educational motivations. As digital platforms increasingly offer diverse forms of content, understanding how parents evaluate, select, and justify digital media access becomes crucial for advancing research on digital parenting and children's learning in the digital age.

METHOD

Context and Participants

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore content-based parental decision making in children's digital engagement. Given the relational and contextual nature of content-based parental decision making in children's digital engagement which operates as a process in the context of family routines and home learning environments, a case study approach was considered suitable. The phenomenon of parental decision making in children's digital engagement cannot be separated from its context, as content selection by the parent and educational purpose of access are shaped by children's characteristics, parental beliefs, digital literacy levels, and situational family dynamics. By utilizing a case study design, this study was able to gain understanding and capture valuable in-depth insights of how and why parents enact content selection and giving access for educational purposes. This design works well for understanding intricacies that are situated in specific contexts that are not easily understood using metrics or survey instruments as expressed by (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018).

This qualitative exploratory case study was conducted at a private kindergarten in Jambi, Indonesia. The school was selected to accomplish certain specific criteria relevant to the aims of the study. The selected kindergarten adopts a technology-based approach to learning and integrates digital tools into early childhood education. Moreover, English serves as the main language of instruction during the daily classroom activities, fostering an environment where children engage with bilingual or multilingual practices on a routine basis. The school has a diverse parent population, including parents from different socio-economic and educational background, who support their children's learning at home. The research context provided a deeper understanding of how parents think about and practice involvement when it comes to learning with technology.

Purposive sampling was employed to recruit participants who were considered most relevant to the research objectives. This sampling strategy was appropriate because the study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of explore content-based parental decision making in children's digital engagement rather than to achieve statistical generalization. The criteria outlined below were used to select the participants: (1) parents of kindergarten-aged children enrolled in the identified private school, early childhood in this study refers to children aged 2–6 years, in line with the kindergarten setting where the participants were recruited; (2) parents who were acquainted with the use of digital devices to assist their children's learning; (3) parents who expressed willingness to take part in in-depth interviews and recount their personal journeys; and (4) parents representing diverse social and economic backgrounds to capture a range of perspectives. The participant selection process involved coordination with the school to identify parents who met the established criteria. Information about the study was distributed to potential participants, followed by a brief screening process to confirm eligibility. Following this process, six parents who met the inclusion criteria and consented to participate were selected as participants in this study. Regarding research ethics, they were asked to read, complete, and sign an inform consent form which indicated that their participation in this study was voluntary. They also deserved the right to withdraw their participation in any phases of this study. The following table shows the overview of six parent participants. Specifically, as shown in Table 1, the children of the participants were aged between 2 and 6 years, reflecting the early childhood context of this study.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants and Their Children

Participant	Parental Role	Estimated Age Range	Experience Supporting Learning Using Digital Devices	Language Practice at Home	Occupational Background	Child Age (Years)
P1	Primary caregiver	Mid 30s	Experience supporting children's learning using digital devices	Bilingual	Entrepreneur	4

Participant	Parental Role	Estimated Age Range	Experience Supporting Learning Using Digital Devices	Language Practice at Home	Occupational Background	Child Age (Years)
P2	Primary caregiver	Mid 30s	Experience supporting children's learning using digital devices	Bilingual	Entrepreneur	4
P3	Primary caregiver	Mid 30s	Experience supporting children's learning using digital devices	Multilingual	Entrepreneur	4
P4	Primary caregiver	Early 30s	Experience supporting children's learning using digital devices	Multilingual	Homemaker	5
P5	Primary caregiver	Early 40s	Experience supporting children's learning using digital devices	Bilingual	Civil Servant	5
P6	Primary caregiver	Mid 30s	Experience supporting children's learning using digital devices	Multilingual	Entrepreneur	4

Data sources and analysis

For this study, empirical data were gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted with six parents of early childhood-aged children over a period of approximately about two months. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the flexibility of the parents' experiences while retaining focus on major components of content-based parental decision making in children's digital engagement across participants. The interview guidelines included questions pertaining to parents' decision making in children's digital engagement at home. The interview guide used in this study is provided in Appendix A. Interview topics included content selection by the parent and educational purposes of access. Participants were encouraged to elaborate on their experiences using probing questions, along with examples that were more specific to their daily parenting routines. Moreover, given the focused case study design, six participants were considered sufficient to generate in-depth accounts of parental decision-making in a specific institutional context. Data collection was concluded when no substantially new patterns emerged from the interviews, indicating thematic saturation within the scope of this study.

Consistent with the qualitative research that values depth and reflection, the interviews were structured to facilitate the in-depth narration of participants' lived experiences. As stated by Van Manen (1997) when researchers want to gain clearer insight into participant perspectives and meanings, they conduct in-depth and exploratory interviews. In order to ensure clarity and openness of communication, all interviews were carried out in Bahasa Indonesia, which was the preferred language of the participants. Each participant interview was approximately about 45 minutes. All interview sessions were audio recorded with the consent of the participants. This allowed the sessions to be reviewed and transcribed with greater precision. Pseudonyms were utilized in the transcripts and the findings to ensure confidentiality. Furthermore, the study relied on interview data as the primary source of evidence.

Data analysis was conducted and used a thematic analysis approach. As a first step in the analysis process, the interview transcripts were read multiple times in order to establish a solid understanding and to achieve familiarity with the data. Provisional codes were developed based on the focus of the research and the topics addressed of the interview questions, particularly those related to parental decision making with content-based in children's digital engagement. During data reduction, pertinent data were processed, structured, and refined, whereas data unrelated to

the research topic were set aside. Data reduction refers to the analytical process that describes the sharpening, sorting, and focusing of data to aid in the understanding of the meaning (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). During this process patterns in parents' accounts started to emerge.

The displayed coded data were analysed to identify relational patterns among the codes and to develop broader categories. These categories were further refined into themes that represented distinct forms of content-based parental decision making in children's digital engagement. Particular attention was given to how parents described their involvement through decision making of content selection and educational purposes of access. To improve analytical rigor, themes were compared across participants to discern both repetitive patterns and contextual differences. The process of drawing conclusions and verification involved going back to the data to confirm that the themes were reliably backed by the participants' accounts. The final themes were verified from this iterative analysis and were used to structure the findings presented in the Results section. Trustworthiness of the study was ensured through member checking. Participants were provided with access of their interview transcripts and were asked to assess and review them for accuracy and clarity. Participants were also able to provide additional comments and explanations, to verify the accuracy and representations of their viewpoints. The findings were anchored in participant's experiences through reflexive engagement with the data, and aligned with the research objectives. Furthermore, this study adhered to basic ethical principles for research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews, and participation was voluntary. Participants' identities were anonymized using pseudonyms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the study, focusing on how content-based parental decision making in children's digital engagement through thematic analysis of interview data, the study identifies key patterns in how parents evaluate and regulate children's access to digital media. Rather than focusing solely on the duration of device use, parents demonstrated a strong emphasis on assessing the type and purpose of digital content accessed by their children. This indicates a shift from traditional screen-time regulation toward a more content-oriented approach to digital parenting. Two major themes emerged from the analysis: content selection by parents and educational purposes of digital access. These themes illustrate how parents actively negotiate the opportunities and risks of digital media by prioritizing educational value and carefully selecting appropriate content for their children.

Content Selection by Parent

The findings of this study reveal that parents play an active role in selecting and regulating the digital content accessed by their children. Rather than focusing primarily on limiting screen time, parents emphasized the importance of ensuring that the content their children consume is safe, age-appropriate, and developmentally beneficial. Parents reported adopting various strategies to curate their children's digital environments, including selecting specific applications, downloading content in advance, monitoring online activities, and blocking inappropriate material. These practices illustrate how parents actively shape children's digital experiences through deliberate content-based decision-making.

Parents in this study demonstrated active involvement in selecting and controlling the type of digital content accessed by their children. Rather than allowing unrestricted browsing, several parents reported deliberately preparing and curating digital materials before children accessed digital devices. This practice allowed parents to ensure that the content was appropriate for their children's age and aligned with their developmental needs. One participant explained:

Parent #1

When my child uses the tablet that I have prepared for them, I usually check the applications or videos they watch first. I prefer content that is safe for children, such as educational videos or cartoons without violence. For videos, I even provide ones that are already downloaded and available offline, so my child cannot access other content. The videos I download are those that I believe are appropriate for their age and help prevent overstimulation (Parent 1, In-depth interview, 16 May 2025, Researcher Translation).

This finding indicates that parents adopt proactive strategies to regulate children's digital exposure by pre-selecting and filtering digital content, rather than simply limiting screen time. Parents in this study also reported actively selecting digital platforms and channels that they perceived as appropriate and beneficial for their children. Instead of allowing unrestricted access to general media platforms, parents often directed their children toward child-friendly applications and curated digital environments. One participant described deliberately limiting access to mainstream platforms and selecting specific channels designed for children:

Parent #2

Nowadays there is a lot of content that is not appropriate for children's age, so I make sure to select what my child watches. I mainly focus on child-friendly applications, for example YouTube Kids. You know, YouTube Kids is specifically designed for children, so I do not allow my child to watch content on the regular YouTube application. I also choose certain YouTube channels that I think are beneficial, especially those that use English, such as Ms. Rachel or videos about the ABC alphabet. Most of the content is in English, and that is usually what I allow my child to watch. For example, my child likes Numberblocks, which is an animation about numbers. From that animation, children can learn numbers as well as colours. So I usually search for references on Google to find content that is suitable for my child (Parent 2, In-depth interview, 16 May 2025, Researcher Translation).

The participant further explained that they actively searched for appropriate content online in order to ensure that the digital material accessed by their child was both age-appropriate and developmentally beneficial. Parents in this study often emphasized that their primary concern was not the amount of time children spent using digital devices but rather the type of content they accessed. Several parents reported allowing flexible screen time as long as the content was considered appropriate and beneficial for their children's development. One participant explained:

Parent #3

I don't really limit my child's screen time, but I do monitor what they do. On a regular day my child is allowed to do digital activities for a couple of hours, and on weekends I even let my child watch and play the games that I downloaded in the tablet. What matters more to me is the content. If the content is good and appropriate for their age, I allow it. For example, when we watch something on Netflix, there are age guidelines, and the same applies to videos. Recently my child has been enjoying Lingokids. It is very good for expanding English vocabulary and, in my opinion it is very safe for children (Parent 3, In-depth interview, 18 May 2025, Researcher Translation).

The participant further described relying on age-based guidelines provided by digital platforms, such as Netflix, as well as selecting educational applications such as Lingokids that support children's language development while remaining safe for child users. Parents also described actively controlling children's access to digital applications and monitoring the content they consume. Rather than allowing children to independently search for digital materials online, some parents preferred to pre-select applications and supervise their children's viewing activities. One participant explained:

Parent #4

I usually download applications that I believe are suitable for my child, so they cannot randomly search for content on the internet. I also look at my child's YouTube videos. If I see a video that I think is bad, I block it right away. I also think the use of screen time itself isn't necessarily bad, but there should always be parental guidance when using it (Parent 4, In-depth interview, 13 June 2025, Researcher Translation).

This practice reflects parents' efforts to create a controlled digital environment where children's exposure to online content is carefully regulated. The participant further emphasized that digital media use is not inherently problematic as long as it is accompanied by parental supervision. Some parents reported adopting multiple layers of content control to ensure that their children were exposed only to appropriate digital material. Even when using child-oriented platforms such as YouTube Kids, parents continued to actively evaluate and filter the content available to their children. One participant explained:

Parent #5

So the YouTube my child uses is YouTube Kids. However, there are still some accounts that I block. Even though YouTube Kids may consider certain content acceptable, in my opinion it is not always appropriate. Therefore, even though the application already has filters, I still double-check what my child watches or plays. I even try all the games first to make sure they are appropriate for my child's age, developmental stage, and also in line with the rules in our family (Parent 5, In-depth interview, 15 June 2025, Researcher Translation).

The participant further described how they personally tested games and reviewed content before allowing their child to access them, ensuring that the material aligned with their child's developmental needs as well as the family's rules regarding digital media use. In addition to directly monitoring children's digital activities, some parents described engaging in information-seeking practices before allowing their children to access particular applications. Parents often relied on application reviews or discussions with other parents to evaluate whether certain digital platforms were appropriate for their children. One participant explained:

Parent #6

Usually I check the application reviews first or ask my friends whether the application is suitable for children or not. I often share and discuss these things with my friends. The important thing for me is that I filter the applications first to determine which ones are appropriate and which ones are not (Parent 6, In-depth interview, 16 June 2025, Researcher Translation).

This finding suggests that parental decision-making regarding children's digital engagement is not only based on individual judgment but is also shaped by shared knowledge and peer discussions among parents. Furthermore, these findings demonstrate that parents are actively involved in shaping their children's digital media environments through deliberate content selection. Rather than relying solely on time restrictions, parents adopt a range of strategies to evaluate, filter, and curate digital content before allowing their children to access it. These practices reflect a shift in parental mediation from focusing primarily on limiting screen time toward emphasizing the quality, safety, and developmental appropriateness of digital media content.

The findings indicate that parents increasingly prioritize content quality over screen time duration when regulating children's digital media use. Parents in this study were not primarily concerned with the number of hours their children spent using digital devices instead, they focused on ensuring that the content accessed was appropriate, educational, and aligned with their family values. Parents were actively curating their children's digital environments by pre-selecting applications, filtering platforms and monitoring children's media consumption. This indicates that digital parenting practices are shifting toward a content-based model where parents evaluate the developmental value of digital media instead of imposing blanket restrictions on screens.

This turn is important because traditional narrative of children's digital media use has largely relied upon time limits on screen time as the primary mechanism for protecting children from the potential harms associated with digital. Yet recent work has shown that the developmental consequences of digital media use are better predicted by a combination of the nature and content quality than simply total exposure time (Gottschalk, 2019; Przybylski and Weinstein, 2017). When parents emphasize content selection, they acknowledge that digital technologies can serve both as potential risks and as opportunities for learning and development (Odgers and Jensen, 2020). Consequently, focusing on content-based decision-making may provide a more nuanced understanding of children's digital engagement than approaches that rely solely on limiting screen time. Furthermore, these findings point to parents as active curators of children's digital environments. Parents do not just supervise the media use of their children but also actively search for suitable applications, evaluate digital content, and exchange information with other parents. These practices show how in the digital era that parenting is now often situated within competing contexts of media, as parents must constantly rely on their judgment and negotiation skills to determine what platforms and content to prioritize for their children when there are so many potential options available online and all being driven by algorithms.

As analysed through the lens of Parental Mediation Theory, these practices represent active and restrictive mediation in which parents assist children with media experiences by curating appropriate content and restricting exposure to negative materials (Nikken and Opree, 2018). Active mediation involves parents interacting with and evaluating media content, while restrictive mediation is imposing limits on children's access to media. So with digital media these strategies are often reinforced with technological tools like filtering by platforms or applications. Findings are also consistent with the notion of digital parenting that parents adjust their parenting styles to navigate the opportunities and threats associated with digital technologies (Modecki et al., 2022). Digital parenting is not just about imposing restrictions on media use but it's also about supporting children's positive digital experiences with guidance, supervision and content curation. The parents in this study, by choosing educational channels, testing applications and reviewing digital content before children have access to it, show practices consistent with this emerging form of parenting. Finally, these findings align with emerging research that advocates for moving away from the screen-time framework when exploring children's digital media use. Scholars have criticized an exclusive focus on the duration of media use, noting that this does not adequately represent children's experiences with digital technologies (Domoff et al., 2019). Instead, how parents assess and choose digital content offers more profound insight into how families negotiate the opportunities and risks of digital media in modern childhood.

Educational Purposes of Access

The findings of this study indicate that parents do not perceive children's digital media use solely as a form of entertainment, but rather as a meaningful tool to support learning and development. Parents actively provide access to digital devices with the intention of facilitating children's cognitive, linguistic, and academic growth. Digital media are frequently used to introduce basic educational concepts, enhance language skills, and support school-related learning activities. These practices reflect how parents frame children's digital engagement as a productive and educational experience rather than passive consumption.

Parents in this study also described providing digital access with the intention of supporting their children's learning and development. Rather than perceiving digital devices solely as sources of entertainment, parents often used them as tools to introduce basic educational concepts such as letters, numbers, and colours. One participant explained:

Parent #1

My child has a tablet that I specifically prepared for the personal use, separate from the devices used by me or the father. When I allow my child to use the tablet, it is mainly for learning purposes. For example, my child watches videos about letters, numbers, or colours. So it is not only for entertainment, but I intentionally guide them to learn through it (Parent 1, In-depth interview, 16 May 2025, Researcher Translation).

This finding illustrates how parents actively frame children's digital engagement as an opportunity for learning rather than merely as a recreational activity. In addition to introducing basic concepts through digital media, parents also described using educational applications to support children's literacy development. Several participants viewed digital technologies as tools that could complement formal education by helping children practice reading and expand their vocabulary. One participant explained:

Parent #2

Nowadays there are many applications designed specifically for children's learning. My child sometimes uses these applications to practice reading or to learn new words. In my opinion, technology can support children's learning process, both as a complement to learning at school and as an additional learning resource at home (Parent 2, In-depth interview, 16 May 2025, Researcher Translation).

The participant further emphasized that digital technologies could function as a supportive learning resource that complements children's educational experiences both at school and at home. Parents also described using digital devices as tools to support children's curiosity and exploratory learning. Digital platforms were often used to search for information related to topics children encountered in their everyday experiences, including subjects they learned at school. In some cases, parents and children engaged in these activities together, turning digital media use into a shared learning experience. One participant explained:

Parent #3

Sometimes my child and I use the tablet together to look for information and learn together. For example, when my child becomes curious about animals or something they learned at school, they usually search for videos or pictures on the internet using the tablet. However, this is always done under my supervision and guidance (Parent 3, In-depth interview, 18 May 2025, Researcher Translation).

This practice illustrates how digital media can facilitate interactive learning experiences in which parents actively support children's curiosity and knowledge development. Parents also highlighted the role of digital media in supporting children's language development. Exposure to educational videos, particularly those in English, was perceived as an effective way for children to acquire new vocabulary. One participant explained:

Parent #4

From what I see, children nowadays can also learn language from what they watch. My child often repeats English words from the videos he watch, which helps expand the vocabulary. Initially, they only knew simple words, but now they learn many new words every day. However, I still accompany my child while watching (Parent 4, In-depth interview, 13 June 2025, Researcher Translation).

In addition to videos and informational content, parents also highlighted the use of educational games as a means to support children's cognitive development. Digital games were often perceived not merely as entertainment but as tools that facilitate learning through interactive engagement. One participant explained:

Parent #5

Some of the games and content that I provide for my child are specifically intended for educational purposes. For example, there are games that teach counting or involve puzzle-solving. There are two games that I find particularly well such as Lingokids and Khan Academy. So while playing, my child is also learning. These games help my child understand numbers and letters, although the screen time is still limited (Parent 5, In-depth interview, 15 June 2025, Researcher Translation).

The participant further mentioned applications such as Lingokids and Khan Academy, which were considered effective in helping children understand numbers and letters through interactive learning activities. This finding reflects how parents integrate play-based learning into children's digital engagement while still maintaining control over usage duration.

Parents also described using digital media to support children's formal education by providing access to learning materials related to school subjects. In some cases, video-based content was perceived as more effective in helping children understand academic concepts compared to traditional learning resources such as textbooks. One participant explained:

Parent #6
I often provide my child with access to videos related to school lessons. Sometimes, explanations from videos are easier for my child to understand compared to those from textbooks (Parent 6, In-depth interview, 16 June 2025, Researcher Translation).

This finding indicates that parents view digital media as a complementary educational resource that can enhance children's understanding of school materials through more engaging and accessible formats. Furthermore, these findings demonstrate that parents actively position digital media as a learning resource that supports children's development across multiple domains, including literacy, language acquisition, and academic understanding. Rather than viewing digital media as purely recreational, parents integrate it into children's daily routines as a tool for learning, exploration, and skill development. This reflects a shift in how digital media are perceived within family contexts, where technology is increasingly recognized as an important component of children's educational experiences.

The results indicated that parents see children's use of digital media much more as an opportunity to engage them educationally than passively entertain them. Parents' guide children's digital behaviour to find learning-based content, such as educational videos, language-learning resources and interactive apps. This means that more and more digital media are becoming part of everyday environments for children's learning, both in formal education settings and less formally. Importantly, these practices show that children's digital engagement is driven not only by exposure to technology, but also by parents' intent to drive learning outcomes. Previous research has shown that digital media can support early learning when content is developmentally appropriate and guided by adults (Barr et al., 2020). This finding is important because it challenges the dominant narrative that describes children's digital media use primarily as a risk factor for developmental problems.

Although excessive screen time remains an issue of contemporary concern, these findings underscore the fact that digital media can also be used as effective educational tools if applied in a proper manner. Evidence suggests that high-quality educational media can support language development, literacy skills, and cognitive growth in children (Hirsh-pasek et al., 2015; Neumann, 2020). Carefully choosing what to provide for educational content enables parents to turn the digital media from a potentially risky environment into a powerful vehicle for learning. Moreover, these results highlight the value of parental mediation in optimizing the educational potential of digital media. Rather than providing only access to digital devices, the parents in this study helped guide children's use of those devices by selecting what they find appropriate for their age group, co-engaging with them in learning activities and contextualising their digitisation experiences around educational goals. This marks the increasingly prominent role of parents as facilitator in children's learning experiences in their homes, where digital technologies are increasingly used to supplement formal schooling.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings can be explained through Uses and Gratifications Theory, which suggests that individuals actively select media to fulfil specific needs, including educational and cognitive needs (Shao, 2009). In this context, parents act as decision-makers who intentionally choose digital content that satisfies children's learning needs, rather than allowing passive consumption of entertainment media. The findings are also consistent with Parental Mediation Theory, particularly the concept of active mediation, where parents' guide and support children's interpretation and use of media content (Nikken and Opree, 2018). By engaging in co-learning activities, selecting educational applications, and monitoring children's media use, parents shape how children interact with digital media and influence the outcomes of these interactions.

This study offers a novel contribution by shifting the analytical focus of children's digital media use from a screen time–based perspective to a content-based parental decision-making framework. While previous studies have predominantly emphasized the risks associated with excessive screen exposure and the need for time restrictions, this research highlights how parents actively evaluate, select, and curate digital content based on its perceived educational value and developmental appropriateness. By integrating two key dimensions, content selection by parents and educational purposes of access this study advances the understanding of digital parenting as a deliberate and reflective process rather than merely a regulatory practice. Furthermore, the findings contribute to the growing discourse on "beyond screen time", demonstrating that the quality, purpose, and context of digital media use are more critical than duration alone in shaping children's digital experiences and learning outcomes.

Integrated Discussion: A Process Model of Content-Based Parental Decision-Making

While the findings were presented across two themes, both content selection and educational purposes of access reflect a broader process of parental decision-making in children's digital engagement. Based on these findings, this study proposes a process-oriented model of content-based parental decision-making, as illustrated in Figure 1.

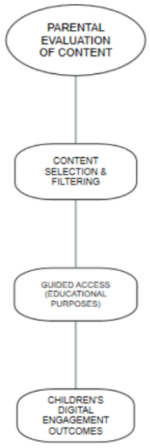

Figure 1. Process Model of Content-Based Parental Decision-Making

The model illustrates how parents engage in a continuous process of evaluating digital content, selecting and filtering media, and guiding children's access for educational purposes. These stages are interconnected and highlight that parental mediation extends beyond restricting screen time, involving active curation of children's digital environments. This model extends existing parental mediation perspectives by emphasizing the evaluative and decision-making processes underlying children's digital engagement, rather than focusing solely on regulatory strategies (Nikken and Opree, 2018). It also aligns with Uses and Gratifications Theory, as parents actively select content to support children's developmental and educational needs. However, the findings should be interpreted within the context of a private, English-medium kindergarten, where parents may have greater access to educational digital resources. In addition, as the data rely on self-reported accounts, there is a possibility of social desirability bias in how parents describe their digital parenting practices. Overall, this model highlights that digital parenting is increasingly shaped by content quality and educational intent, offering a more process-oriented understanding of children's digital engagement beyond screen time.

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study involved a small sample of six parents from a single private kindergarten in Jambi, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other contexts. Second, the study was conducted in a private, English-medium educational setting, where parents may have greater access to digital resources and educational applications. This context may influence parents' emphasis on content quality and educational use of digital media. Third, the data were based on self-reported accounts obtained through interviews, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Parents may have presented idealized descriptions of their digital parenting practices, particularly regarding supervision and content selection.

Finally, the study relied on a single data source (interviews) without additional methods such as observation or document analysis. Future research could involve more diverse participants and multiple data sources to provide a more comprehensive understanding of parental decision-making in children's digital engagement.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how parents make content-based decisions regarding children's digital media use, moving beyond traditional screen-time frameworks. The findings show that parents play an active role in shaping children's digital engagement by evaluating, selecting, and guiding access to digital content based on its quality, safety, and developmental appropriateness. In addition, digital media are increasingly used as tools to support children's learning, including language development, literacy, and school-related activities. These findings highlight a shift in parental mediation practices from time-based regulation toward more intentional and content-oriented decision-making. By emphasizing content quality and educational purpose, this study contributes to a more process-oriented understanding of digital parenting beyond screen time. However, the findings should be interpreted within the limitations of the study,

particularly the small sample size and the specific context of a private kindergarten setting. Future research may involve more diverse participants and contexts to further explore parental decision-making in children's digital engagement.

REFERENCE

Babusabgari, S., & Balakrishna, B. B. (2021). Exposure and use of digital media among under-five children. *International Journal of Contemporary Pediatrics*, *8*(9), 1539–1546. https://doi.org/10.18203/2349-3291.ijcp20213315

Barr, R., Kirkorian, H., Radesky, J., Coyne, S., Nichols, D., Blanchfield, O., … Flynn, R. M. (2020). Beyond Screen Time : A Synergistic Approach to a More Comprehensive Assessment of Family Media Exposure During Early Childhood. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *11*(July), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01283

Blum-ross, A. (2018). MEDIA POLICY BRIEF 17 Families and screen time : Current advice and emerging research. *Journal of Family Communication*, *18*(2), 118–131. https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2018.1429339

Domoff, S. E., Harrison, K., Gearhardt, A. N., Gentile, D. A., Lumeng, J. C., & Miller, A. L. (2019). Development and Validation of the Problematic Media Use Measure : A Parent Report Measure of Screen Media " Addiction " in Children. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, *8*(1), 2–11. https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000163

Gottschalk, F. (2019). *Impacts of technology use on children : Exploring literature on the brain , cognition and well-being*. https://doi.org/10.1787/8296464e-en

Guellai, B., Somogyi, E., & Esseily, R. (2022). Effects of screen exposure on young children ' s cognitive development : A review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, (August), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.923370

Hirsh-pasek, K., Zosh, J. M., Michnick, R., Gray, J. H., & Robb, M. B. (2015). *Putting Education in " Educational " Apps : Lessons From the Science of Learning*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100615569721

Lafton, T., Wilhelmsen, J. E. B., & Holmarsdottir, H. B. (2024). Parental mediation and children ' s digital well- being in family life in Norway Parental mediation and children ' s digital well-being in family. *Journal of Children and Media*, *18*(2), 198–215. https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2023.2299956

Livingstone, S., & Blum-Ross, A. (2023). Parenting for a Digital Future: How Hopes and Fears About Technology Shape Children's Lives. In *Digital Parenting: The Challenges for Families in the Digital Age* (pp. 45–60). Cham, Switzerland: Springer.

Livingstone, S., Ólafsson, K., & Helsper, E. J. (2017). Maximizing Opportunities and Minimizing Risks for Children Online : The Role of Digital Skills in Emerging Strategies of Parental. *Journal of Communication*, *67*(1), 82–105. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12277

Lou, J., Wang, M., Xie, X., Wang, F., Zhou, X., Lu, J., & Zhu, H. (2024). The association between family socio-demographic factors , parental mediation and adolescents ' digital literacy : a cross- sectional study. *BMC Public Health*, *24*(1), 2932. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-20284-4

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (4th editio). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Modecki, K. L., Goldberg, R. E., Wisniewski, P., & Orben, A. (2022). What Is Digital Parenting ? A Systematic Review of Past Measurement and Blueprint for the Future. *Developmental Review*. https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916211072458

Neumann, M. M. (2020). The Impact of Tablets and Apps. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *50*, 89–101. https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2020.1846394

Nikken, P., & Jansz, J. (2014). Developing scales to measure parental mediation of young children's internet use. *Learning, Media and Technology*, *39*(2), 250–266. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439884.2013.782038

Nikken, P., & Opree, S. J. (2018). Guiding Young Children ' s Digital Media Use : SES-Differences in Mediation Concerns and Competence. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 1844–1857. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-018-1018-3

Odgers, C. L., & Jensen, M. R. (2020). Annual Research Review : Adolescent mental health in the digital age : facts , fears , and future directions. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *61*(3), 336–348. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13190

Przybylski, A. K., & Weinstein, N. (2017). A Large-Scale Test of the Goldilocks Hypothesis : Quantifying the Relations Between Digital-Screen Use and the Mental Well-Being of Adolescents. *Psychological Science*, *28*(2), 204–215. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797616678438

Shao, G. (2009). Understanding the appeal of user-generated media : a uses and gratification perspective. *Internet Research*, *19*(1), 7–25. https://doi.org/10.1108/10662240910927795

Swider-cios, E., Vermeij, A., & Sitskoorn, M. M. (2023). Young children and screen-based media : The impact on cognitive and socioemotional development and the importance of parental mediation. *Cognitive Development*, *66*(March), 101319. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cogdev.2023.101319

Van Manen, M. (1997). *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (2nd ed.). London: Althouse Press.

Wang, J., & Liu, Ru-DeDing, YiHong, W. L. (2024). How Parental Mediation and Parental Phubbing Affect Preschool Children ' s Screen Media Use : *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, *27*(9), 651–657. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2023.0638

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Zhao, P., Bazarova, N. N., & Valle, N. (2023). Digital parenting divides : the role of parental capital and digital parenting readiness in parental digital mediation. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/jcmc/zmad032

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author declares that there is no funding or financial support received for this study.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

SA conceived and designed the study, conducted data collection, performed data analysis, and drafted the manuscript. RRP contributed to data analysis, reviewed and edited the manuscript, and provided critical revisions. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author used ChatGPT (OpenAI) during the preparation of this work for language refinement, structuring, and drafting support. After using this tool, the author thoroughly reviewed and edited the content and takes full responsibility for the final version of the manuscript.

***Saharuddin (Corresponding Author)**
Universitas Jambi,
Jl. Raya Jambi Muara Bulian, KM 15, Desa Mendalo Darat, Kec. Jambi Luar Kota, Kab. Muaro Jambi, Indonesia
Email: saharudin.fkip@unja.ac.id

Regita Riani Putri
Universitas Jambi,
Jl. Raya Jambi Muara Bulian, KM 15, Desa Mendalo Darat, Kec. Jambi Luar Kota, Kab. Muaro Jambi, Indonesia
Email: regitarianiputri6@gmail.com