



Negotiating Tradition and Digital Technology in Family-Based Informal Learning: an Ethnographic Study of Dayak Kanayant Parenting Practices

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aims to examine how Dayak Kanayant families in West Kalimantan negotiate traditional parenting values with the influence of digital technology in the context of family-based informal learning. The study responds to the limited attention in educational technology scholarship to indigenous family environments as informal learning spaces shaped by cultural logic, kinship relations, and distinctive forms of digital mediation. **Methods:** This study employed a qualitative ethnographic approach in Desa Terap, Toho District, Mempawah Regency, West Kalimantan. Data were collected over four months through in-depth interviews, participant observation, field notes, and documentation involving parents, grandparents, and children. Data analysis was conducted using a thematic-interpretative approach through repeated reading of interview transcripts and field notes, initial coding, theme development, ethnographic interpretation, and triangulation across interviews, observations, and documentation. **Findings:** The findings show that parenting in Dayak Kanayant families is practiced collectively through the involvement of parents, grandparents, and extended family members. Children learn discipline, respect for elders, cooperation, and cultural responsibility through observation, imitation, and direct participation in family and community activities. The presence of digital technology, particularly smartphones, creates new tensions by shifting some children's attention from communal activities to screen-based activities. However, digital technology is neither fully rejected nor simply accepted. Families negotiate its use by regulating screen time, prioritizing customary and family obligations, and using digital communication to maintain emotional and educational connections with parents working outside the village. **Research Implications:** The findings suggest that educational technology should not only be understood as a school-based learning tool, but also as a culturally mediated learning resource within family environments. Therefore, digital literacy and family education programs need to consider kinship structures, intergenerational authority, and the local values of indigenous communities. **Originality:** This study contributes to educational technology scholarship by showing how indigenous families negotiate digital technology through culturally embedded parenting practices, rather than experiencing technology merely as a disruptive force against tradition.



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INTRODUCTION

Parenting is an important social and educational process through which knowledge, values, moral norms, and cultural expectations are transmitted from one generation to the next. In many communities, children do not learn only through formal schooling, but also through everyday involvement in family routines, community obligations, customary activities, and intergenerational interaction. From the perspective of educational technology and informal learning, the family can be understood as a culturally embedded learning environment where children acquire practical knowledge, social competence, and moral orientation through observation, imitation, participation, and direct guidance (Rogoff, 2003; Neumann, 2018; Livingstone et al., 2020).

Informal learning refers to learning processes that occur outside formal educational structures and are often embedded in everyday life. Such learning is not always designed as formal instruction, but it produces meaningful educational outcomes through repeated involvement in social and cultural practices. In family environments, informal learning is shaped by emotional relationships, authority, affection, cultural expectations, and the organization of household life. This understanding is particularly important in indigenous contexts because learning is often inseparable from kinship relations, customary obligations, land-based practices, ritual participation, and respect for elders (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 2003; Lancy, 2015).

The development of digital technology has transformed these informal learning environments. Smartphones, social media, messaging applications, and online content have become part of children's everyday lives, including in rural and indigenous communities. Digital technology enables children to access information, entertainment, and communication beyond the boundaries of the household and village. However, digital technology also introduces new tensions into family life, especially when screen-based activities compete with household work, outdoor play, customary practices, and intergenerational learning (Neumann et al., 2017; Livingstone et al., 2018; Soyooft et al., 2024).

Previous studies on children's digital media use have emphasized the importance of parental mediation. Parental mediation refers to the ways parents' guide, regulate, monitor, restrict, or co-use digital media with children. This concept is relevant because the educational value of technology does not depend only on the availability of digital devices, but also on how families interpret, control, and integrate technology into everyday life. In this study, digital mediation is understood as a culturally embedded process through which family members manage children's technology use based on local values, family expectations, and educational goals (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Nikken & Schols, 2015; Soyooft et al., 2024).

The concept of negotiation is central to this study. Negotiation does not simply mean compromise between tradition and modernity. In this context, negotiation refers to the everyday process through which families decide when children may use technology, what kinds of digital activities are considered appropriate, who has the authority to regulate technology use, and how traditional values are maintained amid digital change. Thus, negotiation is a social, cultural, and educational process that takes place within family and community relations (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020; Soyooft et al., 2024).

In Indonesia, family and community remain important educational spaces, particularly in indigenous communities. Among Dayak communities in West Kalimantan, parenting is not limited to the nuclear family. Children are often cared for and educated through extended kinship networks involving parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and other relatives. Through this collective caregiving system, children learn discipline, respect for elders, cooperation, responsibility, and cultural identity. Learning takes place through involvement in household work, agricultural activities, communal activities, and customary rituals (Lancy, 2015; Junida & Suryaningsi, 2025).

Previous studies on childcare and family life in indigenous communities in West Kalimantan have provided important insights into local culture, children's rights, and the relationship between government policy and indigenous practices. However, limited attention has been given to how everyday parenting practices function as informal learning processes within families, especially in relation to digital technology. This gap is important because digital technology increasingly enters indigenous family life, while its role cannot be adequately understood only through school-based or universal models of educational technology (Livingstone et al., 2020; Soyooft et al., 2024).

The Dayak Kanayant community in Desa Terap, Toho District, Mempawah Regency, West Kalimantan, provides an important context for examining these dynamics. Families in this community continue to maintain customary values and collective forms of parenting, while at the same time facing increased digital connectivity and labor migration. Children's smartphone use creates new challenges for traditional learning practices. However, digital communication also allows parents working outside the village to remain involved in children's emotional and educational lives. These conditions show that digital technology is neither merely destructive nor automatically beneficial. Its meaning depends on how families negotiate the role of technology within culturally rooted parenting practices.

Therefore, this study aims to examine how Dayak Kanayant families negotiate traditional parenting values and digital technology in family-based informal learning. Using an ethnographic approach, this study seeks to show how parenting, kinship, cultural values, and digital mediation are interconnected in everyday family life. This study contributes to educational technology scholarship by expanding attention from formal classrooms to indigenous family learning environments.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative design with an ethnographic approach. The ethnographic approach was selected because this study aims to understand parenting not only as an individual parental practice, but also as an informal learning

system embedded in the everyday life of Dayak Kanayant families. Ethnography enables the researcher to understand social practices from the participants' perspectives and to examine how cultural values, kinship relations, customary practices, and digital technology are negotiated in everyday family interactions (Atkinson, 2015; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

The research was conducted in Desa Terap, Toho District, Mempawah Regency, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. This location was selected because it is inhabited by Dayak Kanayant families who continue to maintain customary traditions while increasingly engaging with digital technology. The village context also reflects collective caregiving, intergenerational learning, increasing digital access, and labor migration, making it relevant for examining the relationship between tradition and technology in family-based informal learning.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in parenting, childcare, and family learning practices. A total of 30 participants were involved in this study, consisting of 12 parents aged 25–45 years, 8 grandparents aged 55–70 years, and 10 children aged 7–15 years. The inclusion of parents, grandparents, and children was intended to capture the intergenerational nature of parenting practices in Dayak Kanayant families. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities.

Data were collected over four months through in-depth interviews, participant observation, field notes, and documentation. Interviews with parents and grandparents explored parenting values, children's learning practices, customary obligations, perceptions of digital technology, and strategies for regulating children's smartphone use. Interviews with children focused on daily routines, learning experiences, technology use, and their involvement in family and community activities. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and, when necessary, supported by the local Kanayant language.

Participant observation was conducted during everyday household routines, children's interactions with extended family members, agricultural activities, and selected customary or communal events. Observation focused on how children learned through participation, how adults guided or corrected children, and how digital devices were used or restricted in everyday life. Field notes were used to record interactional details, family routines, non-verbal practices, and the researcher's reflections during the research process. In the context of ethnography, field notes do not only serve as descriptive documentation but also as a source of interpretation regarding the social and cultural meanings of observed practices (Atkinson, 2015; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

The researcher's position in this study was that of a participant observer who sought to understand parenting practices from the perspectives of families and the community. Access to the field was obtained through communication with local figures and families who were willing to participate in the study. During the research process, the researcher built relationships with participants through repeated presence in family and community activities, informal conversations, and limited involvement in everyday activities. This strategy was used to gain a deeper understanding of parenting practices, kinship relations, and the use of digital technology in family life.

Data analysis was conducted through thematic and ethnographic interpretation. The analysis began with repeated reading of interview transcripts, observation notes, and documentation. Initial codes were developed from recurring patterns, such as collective parenting, cultural value transmission, children's participation, digital media use, parental regulation of technology, and communication with migrant parents. These codes were then grouped into broader themes. Interpretation was carried out by connecting participants' statements with observed practices and by examining how technology use was situated within local parenting values and family authority structures. This process is consistent with qualitative analysis principles that emphasize the relationship between empirical data, social context, and cultural meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

Triangulation was conducted by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation. Data credibility was strengthened by examining the consistency between what participants said and what was observed in everyday practices. The analysis did not treat interviews as the sole source of data, but interpreted them together with observation notes and the broader context of family and community life. Thus, the findings do not merely record participants' opinions, but also show how parenting practices and technology mediation occur in real-life contexts.

Ethical principles were applied throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, and consent was obtained from adult participants. For child participants, parental or guardian consent and child assent were obtained before interviews or observations were conducted. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw from the study. Pseudonyms were used in reporting the findings. Visual documentation was used only after permission had been obtained from parents or guardians and only when the image did not pose a risk of identification or negative consequences for children. Attention to visual ethics is important because photographs of children in social research may raise issues of privacy, representation, and consent for the use of visual data (Pauwels, 2010).

RESULTS

The findings are organized into five main themes: collective parenting as informal learning, transmission of cultural values through participation, digital technology and changes in children's routines, digital communication with parents working outside the village, and family strategies for regulating technology use.

Collective Parenting as a Family-Based Informal Learning Environment

The findings show that parenting in Dayak Kanayant families is practiced collectively. Childcare and children's education are not only the responsibility of biological parents, but also involve grandparents, uncles, aunts, older siblings, and other relatives living within the same or nearby kinship networks. Children are not viewed solely as the responsibility of the nuclear family, but are guided, corrected, and socialized by various adult figures within the extended family.

In everyday life, children learn through observation and participation. They accompany parents or grandparents in household work, agricultural activities, and communal events. Through these activities, children gradually acquire practical skills, discipline, responsibility, and socially appropriate behavior. Adults rarely separate learning from everyday life. Rather than giving formal instruction, they more often guide children by directly involving them in family and community tasks.

This collective parenting system shows that family-based informal learning is relational and participatory. Children do not only learn what to do, but also how to behave toward parents, relatives, and the community. Respect, obedience, cooperation, and responsibility are developed through repeated involvement in everyday family life. This finding is consistent with the view that child development in many communities cannot be understood only through individual parent-child relations, but must be seen within wider social, cultural, and kinship networks (Rogoff, 2003; Lancy, 2015).

Transmission of Cultural Values Through Participation

This study found that cultural values are transmitted through children's involvement in everyday activities and customary events. Parents and grandparents emphasized that children need to understand family obligations, respect elders, participate in communal life, and recognize customary rules. These values are not taught as abstract concepts, but are embedded in routines, advice, correction, and participation.

When children accompany their parents to the fields, help with household work, or attend communal activities, they do not only acquire practical skills. They also learn patterns of social relations, forms of cooperation, division of responsibilities, and norms of politeness. In this context, family activities become educational spaces that occur naturally. Children learn through observing adults' actions, imitating behaviours considered appropriate, and receiving direct correction when their actions do not align with family expectations.

Children's involvement in customary and communal activities also strengthens cultural identity. Children learn that being part of a family and community means having responsibilities toward others. Thus, parenting is not only intended to make children obedient to their parents, but also to shape children so that they can live according to the social and cultural values of the community. This pattern shows that informal learning in Dayak Kanayant families takes place through social participation, not through formal instruction separated from everyday life. This finding is consistent with sociocultural learning theory, which emphasizes that children's development occurs through social interaction, cultural practices, and guidance from more experienced individuals (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 2003).

Digital Technology and Changes in Children's Learning Routines

The presence of smartphones has introduced new patterns into children's daily routines. Parents and grandparents reported that children increasingly use smartphones for entertainment, games, social media, communication, and occasionally to search for school-related information. Although digital devices provide access to information and communication, they also raise concerns among adults. Children are considered more easily distracted by screen-based activities and sometimes reduce their involvement in household work, outdoor play, or communal interaction.

This change does not mean that tradition has disappeared. Rather, it shows a tension between screen-based activities and participation-based learning. For older family members, excessive smartphone use is considered problematic when it weakens children's sensitivity to family obligations, reduces interaction with elders, or disrupts customary participation. Thus, the main issue is not technology itself, but whether technology interferes with children's moral and social learning.

This finding shows that digital technology in the family cannot be understood only as a learning tool or a source of entertainment. Technology becomes part of social negotiation within the family. Children view smartphones as spaces for entertainment, communication, and access to information, while parents and grandparents evaluate them based on their effects on discipline, responsibility, and children's involvement in family activities. This is consistent

with studies on parental mediation, which show that children’s technology use is strongly influenced by how families guide, restrict, and give meaning to digital activities (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Nikken & Schols, 2015; Soyooof et al., 2024).

Digital Communication with Parents Working Outside the Village

Digital technology also plays a positive role in families affected by labor migration. Some parents who work outside the village use smartphones to communicate with their children, monitor their activities, give advice, and maintain emotional closeness. In this context, smartphones extend parenting practices beyond physical distance. Parents who do not live with their children can remain involved in children’s everyday lives, even though direct caregiving is carried out by grandparents or other relatives in the village.

This finding complicates the assumption that digital technology is merely disruptive. In certain situations, technology supports the continuity of parenting and informal learning. Technology enables guidance, emotional relationships, and educational monitoring across distance. However, this role remains embedded in the collective caregiving system because migrant parents still depend on grandparents and relatives to provide direct supervision in the village.

In the context of Dayak Kanayant families, digital communication does not replace the physical presence of the extended family, but complements existing parenting practices. Smartphones are used to maintain relationships between children and parents outside the village, while daily caregiving continues to be carried out by family members within the child’s immediate environment. This shows that technology can expand the space of parenting, but it remains dependent on local social and kinship structures. This finding is consistent with the view that digital technology in families is always mediated by social relations, parental expectations, and the cultural context in which technology is used (Livingstone et al., 2018; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020).

Family Strategies for Regulating Technology Use

Families apply several strategies to regulate children’s use of digital technology. These strategies include limiting screen time, allowing smartphone use after children complete household or school obligations, restricting technology use during customary events, and encouraging children to continue prioritizing direct interaction with family members. In many cases, grandparents and parents act as moral authorities who remind children when technology use is considered excessive.

These strategies show that digital technology is negotiated, not simply accepted or rejected. Families do not always oppose technology, but evaluate its use based on cultural priorities. Technology is considered acceptable when it supports communication, school learning, or the search for useful information. Conversely, technology is considered problematic when it reduces children’s participation in family obligations, customary practices, or respectful interaction with elders.

This pattern of regulation shows a distinctive form of digital mediation within collective families. Mediation is not only carried out by biological parents, but also by grandparents and extended family members. Therefore, the concept of parental mediation needs to be expanded into family mediation or kinship mediation in indigenous community contexts. In this way, children’s technology use is not only controlled through technical rules, but also through social norms, intergenerational authority, and cultural values that are alive within the family.

Summary of Findings

The following table summarizes the relationship between parenting practices, informal learning processes, and digital mediation in Dayak Kanayant families.

Table 1. Parenting Practices, Learning Outcomes, and Digital Mediation among Dayak Kanayant Families

Parenting Practice	Learning Process	Role of Digital Technology
Collective caregiving involving extended family	Learning through observation and participation in daily activities	Limited use; technology regulated by elders
Discipline and respect for elders	Moral and social learning embedded in routines	Digital use allowed after obligations are fulfilled
Participation in customary rituals	Cultural identity and value transmission	Minimal role; rituals prioritize face-to-face interaction
Communication with migrant parents	Emotional and social learning across distance	Smartphones used for guidance and monitoring
Screen time regulation	Balanced learning routines	Selective use for communication and learning



Figure 1. Daily parenting and learning activities within Dayak Kanayant families

This figure shows children's involvement in everyday family activities as part of informal learning in Dayak Kanayant households. In this context, children learn through direct participation, observation, and interaction with parents and extended family members. The photograph is used with permission from the child's parent or guardian and is presented only to support the analysis of family-based learning practices.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that parenting in Dayak Kanayant families functions as a culturally embedded system of informal learning. Children learn not only through verbal instruction, but also through participation in household work, agricultural activities, customary events, and intergenerational interaction. This finding supports the view that learning in families and communities is relational, participatory, and culturally contextual. In this community, the family is not merely a private domestic space, but also a learning environment where children acquire moral, social, and cultural competence (Vygotsky, 1978; Rogoff, 2003; Lancy, 2015).

The collective character of parenting is an important part of this learning process. Grandparents, parents, and extended relatives are all involved in guiding children. This finding challenges individualistic assumptions about parenting that focus primarily on the nuclear family. In the Dayak Kanayant context, parenting is distributed through kinship relations. Authority is also intergenerational, meaning that children are expected to listen not only to their biological parents but also to grandparents and other family elders. Thus, informal learning is shaped by collective responsibility, not by parental control alone.

This study also shows that digital technology creates both disruption and continuity. Smartphones change children's routines by introducing screen-based activities that can compete with outdoor play, household responsibilities, and customary participation. This reinforces family concerns that unmanaged digital exposure may weaken children's involvement in social and cultural learning. However, the findings also show that technology can support parenting, especially in families affected by labor migration. Through digital communication, parents who live or work outside the village can continue to provide emotional support, advice, and educational monitoring.

The most important analytical point of this study is that Dayak Kanayant families do not respond to technology in a binary way. They neither fully reject nor fully accept digital technology. Instead, they negotiate the role of technology based on cultural values and family priorities. Negotiation occurs when parents and family elders determine when children may use smartphones, what types of digital activities are considered appropriate, and what family or customary obligations must be completed first. In this sense, negotiation is not merely an individual choice, but a social process shaped by authority, kinship, moral expectations, and cultural continuity.

This finding contributes to educational technology scholarship by showing that technology integration cannot be understood only as a matter of access, infrastructure, or digital skills. In indigenous family contexts, the meaning of technology depends on how it is situated within local values and everyday practices. Smartphones may be viewed as a distraction when they reduce children's participation in family responsibilities, but they may also be valued as tools for maintaining communication with migrant parents or accessing school-related information. Thus, the educational role of technology is always culturally mediated (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Nikken & Schols, 2015; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020; Soyoof et al., 2024).

This finding also extends the concept of parental mediation. In much of the literature, parental mediation is often discussed in terms of restriction, monitoring, active guidance, and co-use. This study shows that in collective family systems, mediation is not only carried out by parents. Grandparents and other relatives are also involved in regulating children's technology use. Therefore, in Dayak Kanayant families, digital mediation is better understood as family mediation or kinship mediation, rather than parental mediation alone.

The ethnopsychological dimension of these findings can be seen in the community's expectations regarding child development. A child who is considered well raised is one who understands customs, respects elders, helps the family, and participates responsibly in communal life. Psychological maturity is not primarily defined through individual independence, but through relational responsibility and cultural belonging. Digital technology becomes a concern when it is perceived to weaken these expectations. However, when guided by family authority, technology can be incorporated into children's learning without fully replacing local models of personhood and development.

Overall, this study shows that educational technology research needs to pay greater attention to family-based and culturally grounded learning environments. The Dayak Kanayant case shows that digital learning does not occur in a cultural vacuum. Children's use of technology is interpreted through local ideas about respect, responsibility, kinship, and appropriate participation. Therefore, culturally sensitive digital education programs need to involve not only schools and parents, but also extended families and community elders, particularly in indigenous contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that parenting in Dayak Kanayant families functions as a culturally embedded informal learning environment. Children acquire knowledge, values, discipline, respect for elders, cooperation, and cultural responsibility through collective caregiving and everyday participation in family and community life. Learning is not limited to formal instruction, but occurs through observation, imitation, correction, and involvement in social and customary practices.

The findings also show that digital technology has become part of family life and introduces new tensions into children's learning routines. Smartphones may reduce children's participation in household activities, outdoor activities, and customary practices when their use is not regulated. However, digital technology also supports family-based learning by enabling communication, guidance, and emotional relationships, especially between children and parents who work outside the village.

Rather than replacing traditional parenting practices, technology is used selectively and regulated according to local cultural values. Dayak Kanayant families negotiate technology use by prioritizing customary obligations, regulating screen time, and allowing digital media when it supports communication or learning. Thus, the educational value of technology depends not only on access to devices, but also on cultural mediation within the family.

The findings of this study are contextual and are not intended to be generalized to all indigenous communities. However, they provide analytical insight into how educational technology can be understood within family-based informal learning environments. Future research may compare similar dynamics across different indigenous communities or examine longitudinal changes in children's digital practices and cultural learning over time.

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