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From Supervision to Filtering: Parental Monitoring and Regulatory Practices in Children's Digital Use

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This qualitative study examines parental monitoring and regulatory practices concerning the everyday family contexts of young children's digital media usage. **Method:** Using a qualitative case study design, data collection involved semi-structured interviews with parents of young children, which were analysed using thematic analysis. **Results:** The findings reveal that parental monitoring operates as a layered and progressive process rather than a singular strategy. Three interrelated dimensions emerged: presence-based monitoring, activity inspection practices, and content restriction and digital filtering. Presence-based monitoring was enacted through physical supervision and real-time accompaniment during children's digital engagement. Activity inspection involved reviewing digital traces such as viewing histories and application usage to evaluate appropriateness and interests. Content restriction was implemented through time limits, password protection, parental control applications, account blocking, and curated content selection. These practices demonstrate how parents operate as digital gatekeepers who both shape and control children's digital environments. **Novelty:** The study contributes to the digital parenting by theorizing monitoring as a continuum that ranges from embodied supervision to trace-based inspection and system-based control. The findings highlight the relational and structural aspects of parental authority in digitally mediated childhood. It also underscores the need for a contextualized understanding of digital governance within families.

INTRODUCTION

Digital technologies re rapidly integrated into almost every aspect of modern family life, and this has transformed childhood in profound ways. Smartphones, tablets, streaming services, and other interactive applications have shifted from being considered peripheral tools to being integrated within the daily practices of households (Development, 2025). Recent studies highlight the importance of parental involvement and educational support in guiding young children's engagement with digital media and developing early digital literacy in increasingly technology-mediated learning environments (Adzkie et al., 2025; Siron & Sadiyah, 2025). Furthermore, Children are exposed to digital environments at increasingly younger ages, sometimes even before they enter primary education (Livingstone & Sylwander, 2025). The process has been described by researchers as the emergence of the digital childhood, where children's growing up experiences are integrated with the networked technologies and platforms (Luo et al., 2024). As the use of digital technology within family systems becomes more common, the ways in which parents manage children's engagement with digital media has become an increasingly important area of academic inquiry.

Although digital technologies provide learning, entertainment, and social interaction, there are also considerable risks, especially for young children. The concerns include increased screen time, exposure to content that is inappropriate for their age, diminished direct interpersonal communication, and the potential for safety



risks online (Edwards et al., 2018). Following this pattern, the role of positive digital habits, and possible negative effects, are influenced strongly by parental involvement (Cooper et al., 2024). Rather than viewing digital media as either positive or negative, the latest research suggests the need for an understanding of the structure, the guidance, and the regulation of digital media use within the family context. Consequently, digital parenting is about much more than granting access it is about negotiating, on an on-going basis, issues of safety, responsibility, and developmental safeguarding.

Addressing these challenges, parents do not simply enable access, but rather become active regulators of their children's digital environments. Research on digital parenting has commonly employed the framework of parental mediation, categorizing strategies into active mediation (discussing content), restrictive mediation (setting rules and limits), and co-use (shared media engagement). This framework continues to be applied to various cultural contexts and keeps being relevant to research on children's media use (Daneels, 2017). However, while these categories can describe some useful conceptual elements, they tend to focus on overarching strategies rather than specific everyday actions through which parents monitor and regulate children's digital technologies activities.

Recent studies indicate that digital parenting practices are more intricate and different depending on region. This variation within digital parenting practices has been caused by shifting parenting technology and changing perceptions of risk, parental digital literacy, sociocultural norms, and shifts in risk perceptions (Booij et al., 2025; Wilson et al., 2025). With increasing interactivity, algorithmic personalization, and customization in digital platforms, parents' oversight is needed beyond general rule-setting. Parents have to constantly interpret, negotiate, and respond to the complexities of the digital world. This shift requires further analysis of the micro-level practices that monitoring and regulation occur within the household. Drawing from this viewpoint, this study conceptualizes parental monitoring and regulatory practices as functioning along a progressive continuum of involvement: presence, inspection, and filtering. First, monitoring could mean parental presence, where parents stay physically or proximally close to children during their digital activities and offer immediate supervision and guidance. Second, monitoring may involve inspection, which can include activity checks such as reviewing browsing history, examining content viewed, checking applications, and questioning children directly about technological use. Third, regulatory practices may end up as controlling and filtering practices, such as content restrictions, implementation of parental control systems, and other technological measures to limit access to inappropriate content.

Research shows that parents often use forms of activity checking as a form of their monitoring strategies. For instance, research has indicated that a large number of parents claim to have checked their children's browsing history, reviewed their children's social media accounts, and monitored their children's online communications as a way to protect their children (Przybyła et al., 2014). These practices demonstration a change from monitoring issuances in a passive way to more active monitoring that reflects a greater recognition of the potential harms of the internet. However, these practices raise issues concerning trust, autonomy, and the balancing act of protection and independence. Regarding control and filtering, parents are using more technological and content-control methods to manage their children's online worlds



(Livingstone, 2025). In addition, regulatory practices are not simply technological, they are also rooted in overarching philosophies of parenting, moral assessments of various forms of content, and culturally defined notions of “appropriate” engagement with the digital environment. Therefore, it can be concluded that content restriction should not be seen solely as a technical issue, but rather it represents a social activity that involves parental judgments.

Despite growing research on digital parenting, limited attention has been given to how parental monitoring and regulatory practices operate as interconnected processes within the routines of everyday family life. Existing studies tend to treat mediation strategies as fixed categories, overlooking the dynamic and layered nature of parental oversight in digitally mediated childhoods. Addressing this gap, this study aims to explore how parents monitor and regulate young children’s digital media use through three interrelated dimensions: presence (direct supervision), inspection (activity checking), and filtering (content restriction and control). By conceptualizing these practices as a continuum of involvement, this study contributes to a more nuanced and context-sensitive understanding of digital parenting and the ways parental authority is enacted, negotiated, and sustained within contemporary family settings.

RESEARCH METHOD

Context and Participants

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore parental monitoring and regulatory practices in children’s digital use. Given the relational and contextual nature of parental monitoring and regulatory practice regarding digital access, 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 monitoring and regulation cannot be separated from its context, as parents’ supervisory actions, activity checking practices, and content restrictions 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 monitoring by presence, engage in activity checking, and implement restrictions on inappropriate content. 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 parental monitoring and regulatory practices in children's digital use 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; (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. Data collection continued until thematic patterns became increasingly repetitive and no substantially new categories emerged from participant narratives. The focus of this qualitative case study was not statistical generalization, but rather analytical depth and contextual understanding of parental monitoring and regulatory practices within digitally mediated family environments.

Table 1. Overview of the Research Participants

Participant	Relationship to Child	Estimated Age Range	Experience Supporting Learning Using Digital Devices	Language Practice at Home	Occupational Background
P1	Mother	Mid 30s	Experience supporting children's learning using digital devices	Bilingual	Entrepreneur
P2	Mother	Mid 30s	Experience supporting children's learning using digital devices	Bilingual	Entrepreneur
P3	Father	Mid 30s	Experience supporting children's learning using digital devices	Multilingual	Entrepreneur
P4	Mother	Early 30s	Experience supporting children's learning using digital devices	Multilingual	Homemaker
P5	Mother	Early 40s	Experience supporting children's learning using digital devices	Bilingual	Civil Servant
P6	Mother	Mid 30s	Experience supporting children's learning using digital devices	Multilingual	Entrepreneur

Data sources and analysis

For this study, empirical data were gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted with 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 parental monitoring and regulatory practices in children's digital use across



participants. The interview guidelines included questions pertaining to parents' monitoring and regulatory in their children's learning at home. Interview topics included parents' monitoring strategies during children's digital use, their practices of checking children's digital activities, and the ways in which they restricted or filtered inappropriate content. Questions explored how parents supervised their children while using digital devices, whether and how they reviewed browsing histories or application usage, and what measures were taken to regulate access to specific content. Participants were encouraged to elaborate on their experiences using probing questions, along with examples that were more specific to their daily parenting routines.

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.

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 monitoring and regulatory practices in children's digital use. 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 parental monitoring and regulatory practices in children's digital use. Particular attention was given to how parents described their involvement through monitoring by parental presence, practices of activity checking, and the restriction of inappropriate content during children's digital device use. 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.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the findings of the study, focusing on how parental monitoring and regulatory practices were enacted in young children's digital use. Analysis of the interview data revealed that parental involvement was not expressed as a single, uniform practice, but rather emerged through multiple forms of monitoring and regulation shaped by parents' supervision strategies, their practices of checking children's digital activities, and their efforts to restrict inappropriate content. These forms of involvement demonstrate how parents actively structured and governed children's digital engagement within everyday family contexts, operating progressively from presence-based monitoring to inspection and content control.

Presence-Based Monitoring

Analysis of the interview data show that parental monitoring primarily took the form of presence-based supervision. Supervision across participants included physical proximity, the accompaniment of adults, and direct supervision when children were engaging with the technology. Furthermore, instead of relying on technological monitoring tools, parents value the importance of being physically present when children accessed digital devices.

Parent #1

I don't supervise very intensively because there's a nanny too at home. Most of the time, I only see what my child is doing, if she is watching, doing homework, or playing a game. What I allow my child to access depends mostly on what I see in the tab, mostly apps that enhance her English vocab when there are assignments, and educational games, not like the non-educational ones. I believe that as long as the tablet is used appropriately and under parental controls at home, I think it can teach them something they didn't know before (Parent 1, In-depth interview, 16 Mei 2025, Researcher Translation).

Parent #2

My child has her own tablet that has been provided to her, but it has to be used under my supervision. An adult has to be with my child at all times when she is using the tablet (Parent 2, In-depth interview, 16 Mei 2025, Researcher Translation).

Parent #3

My daughter usually copies what she sees. For example, she watches videos and dances when there is music, and so on. I usually sit with her, and so does her dad, when she watches videos. I never let her use the tablet without someone watching her. If she does not have someone watching her use the tablet, the TV, or something else, she should have no screen time at all (Parent 3, In-depth interview, 18 Mei 2025, Researcher Translation).

Parent #4

My kid is able to use the computer on her own and knows how to press the right buttons to turn on the tablet and computer. Still, I tell the nanny to watch her when she is using the gadgets for fun, but when she is doing school work, studying, or watching educational videos, I help her myself (Parent 4, In-depth interview, 13 June 2025, Researcher Translation).

Parent #5

I think it is okay for him to watch shows like Upin & Ipin. That sort of Malay cartoon is okay with me because they contain values and morals, and it is in line with our Eastern cultured manners. I do allow it, but there has to be screening at home. Concerning screen time at home, it is either me or his father who accompanies him. Concerning entertainment screen time, it is only on weekend, but we accompany him as parents (Parent 5, In-depth interview, 15 June 2025, Researcher Translation).



Parent #6

I almost always sit with my kid while she is studying. If she is reading, I'll read it with her. If she is writing, I sit next to her. If she is on the tablet, I sit next to her. I help with words that she does not know. It is not like I just give her the tablet and walk away, I make sure to help her. She has to ask for it first. If my kid wants to use the tablet, she has to wait for me. If I'm doing something, I usually say to just wait. So she can't just take it (Parent 6, In-depth interview, 16 June 2025, Researcher Translation).

Taken together, these findings show that in this context monitoring was largely spatial and relational. Supervision relied on domestic routines organized through accompaniment, permission, and proximity instead of technological forms of surveillance.

Activity Inspection Practice

The study indicates that aside from presence-based supervision, parents purposely engaged in deliberate inspection practices to observe children's online activities. Unlike real-time accompaniment, inspections included the analysis of digital traces, review of viewing history, verification of children's narratives, and audits of the content on devices periodically. In this context, monitoring includes not only physical proximity, but also evaluative and correctional approaches.

Parent #1

I usually set up the games or the videos that my child can use. Then, every three days or once a week, I check the tablet. Sometimes, I see things that I feel aren't right, so I remove them. If I see anything that I think is educational, like learning the alphabet or numbers, I download it for my child (Parent 1, In-depth interview, 16 Mei 2025, Researcher Translation).

Parent #2

With the apps like YouTube Kids, I can see the history of videos that have been watched, and I can see what content is appropriate, and what interests my child. They have to watch some videos to access content, and I feel like they can be drawn to certain things, so I check it often (Parent 2, In-depth interview, 16 Mei 2025, Researcher Translation).

Parent #3

When my child uses a device, I talk to her about it, not just about the watching and viewing stuff, but I want to know what she saw and what she learned and I ask her to explain it to me. Then I also go see what she watched and explained to me. This also helps improve her communication skills (Parent 3, In-depth interview, 18 Mei 2025, Researcher Translation).

Parent #5

I can see what apps he has opened on the tablet. Even though the apps I put on here are limited, I feel more comfortable. Other things like videos or games. I check and update his tablet about once a week. For example, LingoKids is really good because it helps with vocabulary. But I make him show me all the games before he can play a new one (Parent 5, In-depth interview, 15 June 2025, Researcher Translation).

Taken together, these accounts indicate that parental monitoring was not limited to visible supervision but included structured inspection of digital footprints. Parents periodically reviewed applications, histories, and content suitability, often combining technical checking with dialogic engagement.

Content Restriction and Digital Filtering

The findings show that in addition to supervision and inspection, parents employed explicit restrictive strategies to control children's digital environments. These restrictions included password protection, time restrictions, content blocking, platform restrictions, and selective device provision. In this instance, monitoring shifted away from physical presence or inspection after use, and instead was based on technological and boundary restrictions.



Parent #1

At times when I have other tasks to get done, I permit my child to use the device. I feel secure since I have blocked and filtered the content, so not everything can be watched, and everything is controlled when I am not the one guiding my child while using the device (Parent 1, In-depth interview, 16 Mei 2025, Researcher Translation).

Parent #2

I think YouTube Kids' content can overstimulate my child, and even sometimes be incorporated into their dreams at night. I keep screen time strictly reduced to less than two hours, and I will even set the tablet to Airplane Mode to control what my child can access. I can control the YouTube Kids content to be less overstimulating, as I can select content that has less intense imagery, so my child will not have to deal with images that are bright or painful to look at (Parent 2, In-depth interview, 16 Mei 2025, Researcher Translation).

Parent #3

Typically, my child copies what she watches. If there are songs, she dances with them-- children are great imitators. That's why I always give access, for example, by entering the tablet password myself. It is not free access, everything is with my permission. Considering the tablet is for her, the content is for her specifically, and not infested with other apps that are not meant for kids (Parent 3, In-depth interview, 18 Mei 2025, Researcher Translation).

Parent #4

My daughter is just five years old, and yet I can already see her using a computer. That is precisely the reason why we try to keep limits at home. She is only able to play games on the weekends. During the week, her use is limited to educational purposes, and no she is not allowed to use any devices computer or tablet, and especially not before bed. So, being the parents, we set a password that only we know, so that her access is not completely unrestrained (Parent 4, In-depth interview, 13 June 2025, Researcher Translation).

Parent #5

There are many accounts that I block. YouTube Kids may think that certain accounts are appropriate, but I don't always see it that way. I filter them out and sort them before I let my child watch them (Parent 5, In-depth interview, 15 June 2025, Researcher Translation).

Parent #6

She needs to ask first. My daughter understands she needs to wait for me to use the tablet. If I'm busy, I typically ask her to wait. So she definitely can't just grab the tablet and go. I check the history, and I have a parental control app. I can't remember the name. It restricts what apps or videos she can use (Parent 6, In-depth interview, 16 June 2025, Researcher Translation).

Across the participants, the control was characterized not as a form of punishment, but of protective consideration. Access was dependent, organized, and controlled through the combination of moral assessment and technological control. The growing prevalence of content restriction and digital filtering represents a significant transformation from oversight to structural control. In contrast to presence-based monitoring that depends on proximity and inspection practices that rely on examining digital traces, restriction works via set limits created by a combination of rules and technological systems. Monitoring, in this sense, becomes institutionalized within the digital environment itself. The above finding is important and significant as it exemplifies parental reaction to perceived digital threats within platformized environments. Even apps designed for children, such as YouTube Kids, were not given trust by default. Parents were concerned about potential overstimulation, the promotion of inappropriate values, and the unpredictable nature of the algorithms. Consequently, they did not depend entirely on the safety features of the platform, and added elements of control. This demonstrates that the digital parenting control within families often transcends the control of the platform.



Discussions

Presence-Based Monitoring

The data indicate that arental monitoring primarily occurs as real-time supervision integrated with their spatial arrangements at home. Monitoring is not framed as digital tracking or as a post-usage inspection, but rather as preventive oversight mediated through a physical presence. The digital engagement of children is influenced by the availability of adults, showing that access is more relational rather than autonomous. Furthermore, presence-based monitoring systems reflect a protective orientation, treating the supervision as an active preventive strategy (Chilhood et al., 2024; Taghizadeh & Yourdshahi, 2019). Parents consider the digital risks of the digital space as being immediate and situational, where parents' supervision is needed to provide safety and ensure appropriateness. This model of monitoring positions parents as visible authorities whose control is enacted through physical co-location. It is essential to highlight that children's digital competences do not automatically mean they can act independently (Herman, 2025; Nikken & Schols, 2015). Parental supervision is required, even when children are able to use technology by themselves. This demonstrates that technological mastery is not the same as technological maturity.

The prominence of presence-based monitoring challenges the prevailing view of digital parenting as increasingly technology-driven. While the majority of existing literature focuses on parental control apps, filtering software, and digital forms of surveillance, but the findings of this study show that monitoring still primarily grounded on more traditional forms of embodied supervision. Specifically, instead of relying on oversight from technological systems, parents use physical proximity, presence, and accompaniment as primary means of regulation. This implies that families' digital governance continues to function along the spatial and relational structures of authority. From the perspective of parental mediation theory, this type of supervision has the greatest alignment with supervisory and co-use mediation (Goodall et al., 2025; Valkenburg et al., 2013). However, unlike dialogical active mediation, the supervision seen here acts largely as a form of preventative control. The focus is not on fostering critical engagement with the content, but on ensuring immediate oversight. This suggests a protective stance in which parental presence serves as the regulatory tool (Enes et al., 2026).

The findings can also be understood through social control theory, which proposes proximity and attachment serve as behavioural regulation mechanisms (Costello & Laub, 2020). Regarding digital usage, being physically present enhances accountability and diminishes chances for risky engagement. For that reason, monitoring functions as relational control, instead of purely a form of technological surveillance. Furthermore, the reliance on shared spaces and adult accompaniment reflects where families act as micro-regulatory systems (Livingstone & Blum-ross, 2018). By implementing spatial restrictions, such as limiting device usage to certain spaces and conditioning access to the devices on the presence of an adult, parents solidify the emergent hierarchy of authority within the household. In this regard, digital childhood still remains rooted in traditional family power dynamics rather than personalized digital autonomy. Finally, it is important to consider the factors related to the parents' insistence on presence, especially where the children start imitating the content they view (Koutroubas & Galanakis, 2022). Being aware of the processes involved in observational learning



strengthens parents' perceptions that real-time supervision is needed to guide the interpretation of the behaviour and to prevent the child from imitating behaviour that is undesirable. Taken together, presence-based monitoring reflects continuity rather than rupture in parental authority. Even in fully digitalized environments, proximity continues to be a fundamental regulatory strategy. These findings indicate that digital parenting is not only formed by technological affordances but also by persistent cultural logics of protection, supervision, and responsibility as hierarchy.

Activity Inspection Practice

The emergence of activity inspection practices may indicate a shift from supervision in person to the use of information based monitoring. Unlike presence-based monitoring, which depends on spatial proximity, inspection functions through digital traces and affordances of the platforms. Parents are not just monitoring their children but they are also analysing the information generated by their children's online activities. This finding is significant as it illustrates the adaptability of parenting to the platformized childhood environments. Consequently, supervision cannot depend solely on co-presence. Parents need to actively monitor and evaluate what has been watched and consumed. Inspection becomes a strategy of risk management in response to the unpredictability of algorithmic curation. From the perspective of Parental Mediation Theory, these practices extend beyond traditional restrictive mediation (Fam et al., 2018; Hsueh et al., 2016). Although restrictive mediation usually entails setting rules, inspection represents a hybrid type that fuses restrictive control with active mediation. For instance, parent 3's strategy of asking and then verifying illustrates dialogic mediation supported by technological checking. This means monitoring is also communicative and evaluative.

These practices can be viewed in the context of digital surveillance and datafication (Lupton 2017; Siibak et al., 2021). In today's digital world, children's activities generate data such as histories, logs, and patterns of usage. Parents use these data traces to understand and assess their behaviour. Surveillance in this context is not just punitive but protective and analytical. It is a form of care-based surveillance, where monitoring is framed as protective rather than controlling. Moreover, inspection practices are a sign of growing parental digital literacy. The ability to navigate viewing histories, assessment of applications, and evaluation of content indicate that parents' familiarity with platform features influences monitoring. According to Livingstone & Blum-ross (2018) this align with research on digital parenting that digital competence and confidence influence strategies for parental mediation.

Importantly, inspection practices also reveal how trust and control are negotiated. Parents inquire about their child's digital activities, yet conversations are followed by the need for verification. This multi-layered approach implies that trust isn't absolute but rather built conditionally. While children are encouraged to express themselves, the structure of parental authority remains intact due to the monitoring mechanisms. Overall, the inspection of activity shows a shift from more visible forms of monitoring to more trace-based forms of oversight. They physically capture the monitoring, and so do the platforms' infrastructures. This illustrates an emerging paradigm of digital familial governance, where power is manifested through both social relations and the affordances of technology.



Content Restriction and Digital Filtering

These practices articulate with restrictive mediation, which includes both rule-setting and access limitations (Geurts, 2024; Helsper et al., 2025). However, the findings indicate that restrictive mediation in current contexts has transformed into a form of regulation that is embedded within technology. The use of password protection, activation of airplane mode, and the implementations of parental control apps, exemplify how mediation strategies have transformed and are now enacted through digital infrastructures rather than solely relying on interpersonal rules. Furthermore, parenting today often incorporates a form of proactive risk assessment (Sugitanata et al., 2024). Parent concerns about overstimulation, imitation, and exposure to inappropriate content, which demonstrates an increased awareness of possible risks. Restriction functions as a preventive strategy aimed at minimizing uncertainty in algorithmically curated environments.

Furthermore, the practices of restriction demonstrate a type of digital gatekeeping within the realm of the household. By blocking accounts, curating content, and setting rules for access, parents take on the role of the principal regulators of the child's digital engagement. This aligns with conceptualizations of domestic digital governance Livingstone & Blum-ross (2018), where families operate as micro-regulatory systems that negotiate authority, protection, and autonomy. Notably, restrictions were often justified via developmental reasoning. In a similar vein, parents try to handle the external factors that lead to behavioural modelling, by managing the environmental stimuli through restricting exposure and controlling access. Overall, content restriction and digital filtering stand out as the most established and systematized forms of parental monitoring in this study. These practices illustrate that parents' control over digital childhood is not bypassed by technological advancement. Rather, it is reshaped via technological means and regulatory frameworks that incorporate parental control into the digital systems themselves.

Taken together, while previous studies commonly categorize parental mediation into separate strategies such as restrictive mediation, active mediation, and co-use, the findings of this study indicate that these practices are often interconnected within everyday family routines. Rather than functioning as isolated categories, parental monitoring emerged as a layered continuum involving presence-based supervision, trace-based inspection, and technologically embedded filtering practices. This highlights the contextual and dynamic nature of parental regulation within digitally mediated childhood environments.

CONCLUSION

This study explored parental monitoring and regulatory practices in children's digital use through three interrelated dimensions: presence-based monitoring, activity inspection practices, and content restriction and digital filtering. The results show that parental monitoring is not implemented as a singular strategy but is a multi-layered and iterative process that is integrated within day-to-day family activities. First, monitoring was predominantly organised through presence-based supervision, wherein parents used physical closeness and real-time accompaniment to monitor children's online activities. This type of supervision demonstrates a relational and spatial model of control, which centres on the elements of sight and immediacy. Second, parents broadened their monitoring practices from just physical supervision to include



the inspection of activities. By looking at browsing history, checking apps, and cross-examining children's narratives, parents used digital records to assess and understand children's online activities. From this perspective, inspection is a form of adaptation to the platformized environment, where on-going inspection and assessment are necessary for the algorithmic delivery of content.

Lastly, parental regulation was systematized by way of content restriction and digital filtering. Ways in which parents embed control into the digital infrastructure include time limits, password protection, parental control apps, account blocking, and selective content curation. These restriction practices underscore parents' role as digital gatekeepers, who facilitate the construction of safe digital environments based on moral, developmental, and cultural considerations. Taken together, the findings indicate that both relational and structural elements are at play when considering parental monitoring in early childhood. Though digital technologies present additional risks and complexities, the parental figure's authority continues to be the most important factor in influencing how children engage with the digital world. This study contributes to understanding digital parenting practices by conceptualising monitoring as a continuum from presence to inspection to restriction. It highlights how families operate as micro-regulatory systems that negotiate safety, autonomy, and the technological affordances within domestic contexts.

Implications

The findings of this study contribute to the growing scholarship on digital parenting by demonstrating that parental monitoring operates as a layered continuum of supervision, inspection, and filtering practices. The study highlights the importance of understanding parental authority not only as interpersonal regulation but also as a form of domestic digital governance embedded within everyday family routines. These findings may provide insights for educators, policymakers, and parents regarding the importance of contextualized supervision, digital literacy awareness, and age-appropriate digital regulation in early childhood environments. Furthermore, the study suggests that parental involvement in children's digital engagement remains strongly relational despite the increasing use of technological monitoring systems.

Limitations

This study was conducted within a specific qualitative case study context involving six parents from one private kindergarten in Jambi, Indonesia. Therefore, the findings are context-specific and are not intended for statistical generalization. In addition, the study primarily reflects parental perspectives within families that actively engage with digital technologies and bilingual learning environments. Future studies involving more diverse socio-cultural contexts and broader participant groups may provide additional insights into variations in parental monitoring practices across different family settings.

Recommendations

Even though this study identifies valuable aspects of Parental monitoring and regulatory practices in children's digital use a degree of restraint is warranted in regard to its conclusions. The research was carried out with a limited range of participants, specifically with six parents of young children, recruited from a private school setting. Consequently, the results are not aimed at being generalized for all parents and early years' environments. The reason being, variations in socio-cultural, educational and



economic contexts can lead to a range of differing patterns pertaining to parental decision making and practices of digital accessibility. Future research involving a larger and more diverse group of parents across various geographical and educational contexts may produce more expansive and diverse results.

The results indicate that parental monitoring involves more than just setting restrictions, but rather involves more extensive engagement. Positive digital parenting involves the integration of supervision, dialogue, evaluation, and control. Technological control systems often overlook the relational and mediation aspects of dialogic engagement that foster trust and relational guidance. Digital literacy initiatives for parents should include training on specific platform features, such as how to view histories, use filters, and employ parental controls. Developing parents' digital skills may increase their capacity to manage their children's screen time in environments driven by algorithms. Policy makers and platform providers must acknowledge that child-friendly labelling systems alone are generally not regarded as adequate protective measures. Greater transparency in content categorization and algorithmic recommendations may better support parental regulation efforts. Further research should be done on monitoring practices as children gain more autonomy. Longitudinal and cross-cultural research may further clarify the interplay between developmental phases and socio-cultural values as they pertain to digital parental control within families. In conclusion, the practices of parental monitoring and regulatory practices are complex, contextual, and dynamic. Specifically, understanding their complexity is critical for the development of more psychologically sophisticated and contextually sensitive approaches to the phenomenon of digital childhood in contemporary family life.

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