



## The Role of Parents in Using Gadgets for Early Childhood Development

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### ABSTRACT

Early childhood is a golden period in a child's development that greatly determines their future, including in terms of the use of technology such as gadgets. In the digital era, children are increasingly familiar with technological devices from an early age, so the role of parents becomes very crucial in directing the use of gadgets wisely. This study aims to describe the role of parents in the use of gadgets on the development of early childhood, with a focus on parenting strategies and their impact on the cognitive, social, and emotional aspects of children. The approach used is qualitative with a case study type of a 4-year-old child (Ananda R) in Samarinda City. Data were collected through direct observation, interviews with parents, and documentation, then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model. The results of the study showed that the active involvement of parents is very influential in forming healthy gadget usage habits. Ananda R's parents act as guides, facilitators, motivators, and role models. Gadget use is situationally limited, always supervised, and balanced with physical activity, social interaction, and non-digital learning such as reading, playing puzzles, and outdoor activities. The content presented is educational and selectively selected. This support has been proven to support cognitive and social development, as well as helping children manage their emotions. This study emphasizes the importance of parental involvement in digital parenting as an effort to create a balance between the use of technology and the holistic and responsible development of children.

### INTRODUCTION

Early childhood or often referred to as the golden age is a golden period in a child's development that greatly determines their future. At this time, there is rapid development in various aspects, such as intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual intelligence which will greatly determine the direction of the child's development in the future (Febriyanni et al., 2023). Early childhood, namely those in the 0-6 year age group Wasis (2022), is a group that is very easily affected positively or negatively by the use of gadgets.

In the current era of globalization, Science and Technology (IPTEK) is developing rapidly in society, both among adults and children. The use of technology knows no age (Yumarni, 2022). In Indonesian, gadgets are also called gawai. According to Widiawati, Sugiman, and Edy in (Miranti & Putri, 2021) Sophisticated devices with various applications that offer news, social media, hobbies, and entertainment are called gawai. The development of gadgets has a significant impact on human life, especially on children. The existence of

gadgets can easily attract children and it has become commonplace for children to use gadgets in their daily lives (Irfan & Azmin, 2022). With the sophistication of gadgets, children can get information easily and quickly. Technology can also be used by children for new things and as an encouragement to trigger children's creativity to think creatively. Gadgets do have a positive side, such as helping children recognize colors, letters, numbers, and even encouraging creativity through educational applications. However, if children are addicted to gadgets during childhood, their development will be hampered (Rini et al., 2021).

Various previous studies have examined the impact of gadget use by children. For example, Lestari et al. (2024) stated that excessive gadget use and no guidance causes language delays. Other relevant research by Fata et al. (2022) showed that children who were guided by their parents when using gadgets showed better cognitive development than children who were allowed to access gadgets freely. In addition, Hendriani et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of regulation and family involvement in shaping children's digital behavior.

The main problem in this study is the suboptimal role of parents in directing the wise use of gadgets by early childhood, which has the potential to hinder the overall development of children. In this case, the role of parents is a key factor in directing and controlling the use of gadgets by early childhood. Most previous studies have focused more on the negative impacts of gadgets on children, without describing in detail how active parental involvement can shape healthy and educational gadget use patterns.

Thus, this study provides a new contribution in the field of parenting, not only discussing the impact of gadget use, but also explaining how parents' roles accompany children directly when using gadgets. Through a case study approach, this study presents a real picture of mentoring practices in everyday life, which are still rarely discussed in previous studies, especially in relation to the cognitive, social, and emotional development of early childhood.

The importance of the role of parents in the use of gadgets for early childhood is something that cannot be ignored. Parents must provide guidance on the use of technology so that children remain within reasonable limits and provide educational benefits. Parental involvement is needed to limit the duration of use, choose appropriate content, and provide assistance when children access gadgets. Active interaction between parents and children in the use of technology not only prevents negative impacts, but also strengthens children's social, emotional, and cognitive development. Based on the results of observations that have been carried out on Ananda R, aged 4 years, it was found that consistent parental involvement in the use of gadgets has a positive influence on children's development. What Ananda R's parents often do is provide positive habits such as accompanying directly, choosing educational content, providing alternative activities such as playing puzzles, drawing, counting, and discussing the shows they watch. This strategy has been proven to reduce children's dependence on gadgets and encourage more active and enjoyable social interactions.

The purpose of this study is to identify and describe the role of parents in the use of gadgets on the development of early childhood. Specifically, this study focuses on parenting techniques used by parents to accompany gadget use, as well as its impact on aspects of child development such as cognitive, social, and emotional. This study also aims to describe the habituation practices used by parents in everyday life, including how to set duration, filter content, provide examples, and create alternative learning activities for children while playing.

This study is expected to provide benefits for parents, educators, and policy makers in designing effective gadget use assistance strategies, so that they can support the development of early childhood optimally.

## **METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative study approach with a case study type. The focus of the study is the role of parents in the use of gadgets for early childhood development. The main subject in this study was a 4-year-old child domiciled in Samarinda City, hereinafter referred to as Ananda R. The data collection process lasted for 3 weeks through 3 meetings, using direct observation techniques with children, interviews with parents, and documentation in the form of written documents, pictures, and electronic files. Analysis of the results of observations and interviews was then analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques according to Miles and Huberman, which include the process of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Furthermore, triangulation was carried out to ensure the validity of the data by applying source triangulation and triangulation of data collection techniques, namely comparing information from observations, interviews, and documentation, to increase the validity and credibility of the researcher's findings comprehensively.

## **RESULT**

This study was conducted on a 4-year-old child with the initials Ananda R, domiciled in Samarinda city. During the observation, the researcher noticed that Ananda R showed positive social behavior, Ananda R seemed to easily interact with family members and researchers in a very friendly and responsive manner. In daily activities, Ananda R spends a lot of time playing and watching television or videos on Youtube that are educational. However, the use of gadgets at home is limited and is only allowed when outside the home or in places that do not provide toys.

From the results of interviews with Ananda R's parents, it was obtained that Ananda R started using gadgets about two months ago, gadget use is limited, usually only about 30 minutes or less than 1 hour, and sometimes if Ananda R's parents are not with Ananda R, gadget use can be more than 1 hour because there is no parental supervision. However, after Ananda R's parents return home and see Ananda R using the gadget for too long, the gadget will be taken back and not allowed to use the gadget again at home. Ananda R's parents do not set rules regarding the duration of gadget use, but in practice, gadget use is indeed strictly limited. In educating, parents set clear rules regarding gadget use. Ananda R is only allowed to use gadgets under certain conditions, such as when outside the home. Gadget use is always under direct supervision from parents or older siblings, to prevent Ananda R from accessing content that is not appropriate for his age. The types of content accessed by Ananda R consist of educational applications such as Baby Bus, children's cartoon shows, and children's song videos. The games played generally have educational content, such as matching colors or pictures.

Ananda R's parents also act as motivators, providing space for Ananda R to play outside the house and interact with peers. This is a form of encouragement so that Ananda R is not too dependent on gadgets, and is interested in healthier physical and social activities. In supervision, where Ananda R's parents actively provide direction regarding content that can be

watched and maintain Ananda R's body position and viewing distance when using gadgets and are not allowed to use gadgets while lying down, and are always directed to look at the screen from a safe distance. In the role of facilitator, Ananda R's parents provide a variety of learning media outside of gadgets, such as puzzles, lego, picture books, and stationery. These activities are not only interesting, but also encourage Ananda R's motor and cognitive abilities without relying on screens. As role models, parents provide direction to watch educational shows such as counting or reading videos, and exemplify the use of gadgets wisely, so that Ananda R's parents not only direct, but also provide direct examples to Ananda R. In the role of encouragement, the learning process is not only carried out through gadgets, but also through games. For example, when Ananda R plays with cars, Ananda R's parents communicate directly, such as inviting him to count, recognize colors that show a fun play-while-learning approach. As an encourager, parents provide Ananda R with an understanding of which content is appropriate to watch, as well as the impact of excessive gadget use. Ananda R is also encouraged to be independent and responsible in choosing content wisely.

The role of Ananda R's parents in reducing Ananda R's dependence on gadgets is to replace screen time with other more meaningful activities, such as inviting him to play outside or go for a walk and do activities that become moments of family togetherness. When Ananda R uses gadgets, communication between your parents and Ananda R remains well established. This interaction can be seen when Ananda R tells stories about what he is watching, such as learning numbers, animal names, or other new knowledge learned from videos. Parents also always maintain emotional closeness with Ananda R. When using gadgets, Ananda R often sits close to family members such as his mother, father, or older sibling, which makes him feel cared for and not alone. In terms of social development, the use of gadgets actually has a positive impact on Ananda R, he is seen to be more active in communicating after watching educational content that broadens Ananda R's social horizons. The use of gadgets has a positive impact on Ananda R's cognitive development such as recognizing numbers, colors, and animal names from selectively selected shows. Because screen time is limited, Ananda R's parents also provide physical activities such as playing with cars, assembling puzzles, and drawing regularly, so that his fine and gross motor skills continue to develop well. In terms of emotional development, Ananda R occasionally shows anger when not given access to gadgets or asked to stop watching. However, Ananda R's parents deal with this with an educational approach, namely explaining the negative effects of using gadgets for too long, even by giving concrete examples of family members who wear glasses because they stare at the screen too often. And parents also always speak well without saying inappropriate things. Overall, the results of these observations and interviews show that the role of parents is very important in forming habits of using gadgets that are wise, balanced, and support children's overall development.

To facilitate understanding and clarify information, the following is a summary table that summarizes important notes from the results of interviews and observations related to Ananda R's gadget use and the role of Ananda R's parents:

**Table 1.** Summary of interview results and observations on Ananda R's use of gadgets and the role of parents.

No	Observation Aspects	Findings
1	Identity and location	Ananda R, a 4 year old child who lives in Samarinda City
2	Time and Frequency of Gadget Use	Ananda R started using gadgets in the last two months. The duration of use is around 30 minutes to 1 hour. Sometimes longer if there is no supervision from parents
3	Rules and supervision	There are no written rules, but only allowed to use gadgets when outside the house or under certain conditions. Use is always under direct supervision by parents or older siblings
4	Types of content and applications	The content used is educational: Babybus, children's cartoons, children's songs, and games that support intelligence such as matching color and picture images
5	The role of parents as motivators	Parents encourage children to play outside the house, interact socially with peers so that they do not become dependent on gadgets
6	The role of parents as supervisors	Parents provide content guidance, maintain body position, prohibit lying down while looking at the screen, and maintain the child's viewing distance from the screen
7	The role of parents as facilitators	Parents provide other learning media such as puzzles, Lego, picture books, and stationery to stimulate cognitive and motor skills
8	The role of parents as role models	Parents provide direct examples of wise gadget use, as well as suggesting positive and educational content.
9	The role of parents as encouragers	The learning process is combined with games, such as counting and recognizing colors while playing with toy cars

No	Observation Aspects	Findings
10	Strategies to reduce gadget dependency	Divert screen time with other activities such as playing outside or family activities together
11	Interaction and communication	Ananda R actively tells about the content he watches. Two-way communication is established between children and parents
12	Emotional closeness	Ananda R often sits close to family members when using gadgets, showing good emotionality
13	Impact on social development	Ananda R became more active in speaking and interacting after watching educational content that broadened his social horizons
14	Impact on cognitive development	Ananda R is able to mention numbers, colors, and animal names, including in simple English
15	Impact on emotional development	Sometimes anger arises when usage is restricted, but parents deal with it in an educational way with a positive approach and real examples from the family environment.

Primary data sources or field data

**Figure 1.** Ananda R Using Gadgets Accompanied by Parents



(1)

**Figure 2.** Baby Bus Educational Application Used by Ananda R



(2)

## DISCUSSION

The active role of Ananda R's parents in assisting Ananda R's use of gadgets shows a form of responsive and targeted parenting. Ananda R's parents not only set limits on gadget use, but also provide direct guidance and consistent education, as the role of parents as educators stated by (Dewi et al., 2023). This guidance is very important, because if we remember that early age is a crucial period for the development of children's character and habits. As expressed by Yildiz et al. (2023) that parents have a role to help children learn.

As educators, Ananda R's parents set clear rules regarding gadget use. Ananda R is only allowed to use gadgets under certain conditions, such as when outside the home. This rule is in line with the view of (Nurpadilah et al., 2024), which states that early childhood needs clear boundaries to strengthen discipline and feel safe. Gadget use is always under direct supervision from Ananda R's parents or older siblings, to prevent children from accessing content that is not appropriate for their age.

According to Khotimah & Zulkarnaen (2023), the role of parents is as a guide, motivator, and facilitator. As a motivator, Ananda R's parents provide space for Ananda R to play outside the home and interact with peers. The role of Ananda R's parents as facilitators can be seen in the efforts when parents provide various non-digital learning media such as picture books, stationery, logos and educational games. According to Piaget's theory quoted by Maghfiroh & Suryana (2021), early childhood requires concrete stimulation that is direct and multisensory in order to develop optimal understanding and cognitive concepts. As a guide, Ananda R's parents actively provide direction regarding the content that can be watched, as well as supervise the child's body position and field of view when using gadgets. Ananda R is not allowed to use gadgets while lying down, and is always directed to look at the screen from a safe distance. As according to Fadila & Wardhani (2022), the role of parents is very important in overcoming the problem of gadget addiction in children.

Ananda R's parents' attitude is not just to forbid, but to provide alternative activities such as playing outside, drawing, playing with cars, or assembling puzzles and other games. This action supports the learning through play approach, which according to Wahyuni & Azizah (2020), is very effective in stimulating children's cognitive and social development.

Ananda R's parents also act as role models or role models (Ing ngarsa sung tuladha), as emphasized in the educational philosophy according to Ki Hadjar Dewantara, the idea of the Three Centers of Education plays an important role in prioritizing education in the family environment (Amaliyah, 2021). Ananda R's parents exemplify wise behavior in using gadgets and direct Ananda R to exemplify educational shows. Ananda R learns not only by hammering advice, but also through real examples carried out by Ananda R's parents in everyday life. As an encouragement (Ing madya mangun karsa), Ananda R's parents use play moments as a means of learning. For example, when Ananda R plays with toy cars, Ananda R's parents insert counting and color recognition activities. This approach strengthens Vygotsky's constructivism theory, which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in child development (Retnaningsih, 2024). not only that, Ananda R's parents also gave encouragement (Tut Wuri Handayani) so that Ananda R could be responsible for his digital behavior, and was given an understanding of the negative impacts of excessive gadget use.

Regarding the duration of gadget use, Ananda R's parents did not set a rigid time limit, but still carried out situational control. Ananda R rarely used gadgets at home, and parents took the gadgets held by Ananda R if they felt that they had been using them for too long. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, young children should not use screens for more than 1 hour per day, and must be supervised by adults (Bee & Pudjiati, 2023).

In terms of content selection, Ananda R's parents selectively allow only educational shows and prohibit content that is not age-appropriate or not useful. This supports the role of parents as digital media curators, as explained by Stevanus & Anindyta (2022), parental content filtering is a form of digital parenting responsibility.

In terms of communication and interaction, Ananda R actively tells his parents about things that Ananda R has learned from his shows, such as numbers and animals. This shows that there is healthy two-way communication, which is part of the scaffolding process in children's learning according to Vygotsky in (Etnawati, 2022).

Emotional closeness is also maintained while children use gadgets. Ananda R often watches while sitting close to family members. This supports the importance of attachment (emotional involvement) between parents and children, as stated by Bowlby in his theory of attachment that influences children's social-emotional development (Fitriyah et al., 2024).

The use of gadgets has a positive impact on Ananda R to become more active in communicating, recognizing colors, mentioning animal names, including in English, well-chosen educational content can broaden children's horizons and vocabulary, in line with theory Munisa (2020) the positive impact of using gadgets is that it makes it easier for children to hone their creativity and intelligence.

Ananda R's parents use an educational approach when Ananda R sometimes shows anger when gadget use is limited. By explaining the negative impacts of excessive use by giving real examples of family members who wear glasses due to excessive gadget use. This approach supports the development of emotional regulation in children according to Annisa (2023), that children need to be guided to understand and manage their emotions from an early age.

Findings from the observation showed that Ananda R remained socially and emotionally active despite having access to gadgets. Ananda R was able to interact with researchers and the surrounding environment positively, and did not show any dependence on gadgets. When asked

to return the gadget, Ananda R did so without getting angry, showing self-control and a good emotional relationship with his parents. This is in line with Bowlby's attachment theory, which states that emotional closeness with parents forms the basis of a child's ability to process emotions and social behavior in a healthy manner (Mawaddah et al., 2024).

When viewed from the position of cognitive and language development, Ananda R shows the ability to recognize colors, numbers and animal names, even in basic English. This shows that appropriately selected educational content can expand children's vocabulary and understanding of the surrounding environment. This experience is in line with the study Isdiyantoro & Maftuhah (2023), which found that the role of parents in the use of digital media including gadgets greatly determines the benefits that children will get.

Ananda R's parents have carried out caring and educating care for the development of the times, so that children can continue to learn and develop, without becoming dependent on gadgets. The habits carried out by Ananda R's parents in accompanying the use of gadgets wisely not only support Ananda R's cognitive, social, and emotional development, but also play a role in forming a responsible character from an early age. In this case, Ananda R's parents not only act as regulators, but also as guides, playmates, and sources of moral values that shape children's personalities amidst the challenges of the digital era.

This study contributes to digital parenting practices by showing that a responsive and adaptive approach can shape children's self-regulation from an early age. It can also be used by PAUD educational institutions as a guideline for early intervention. The limitations of this study lie in a single subject, so the results cannot be generalized. In addition, observations were conducted over a limited period of time which may not represent children's behavior as a whole. Further research is recommended to involve more subjects with diverse family backgrounds, and utilize quantitative methods to measure the impact of parental guidance more measurably.

## **CONCLUSION**

The role of parents is very important in accompanying children when using gadgets so that their use is not excessive and still supports the child's development. From the results of observations on Ananda R, children can use gadgets healthily because parents actively accompany and guide them. Parents help regulate usage time, choose educational content, and invite children to discuss and provide alternative activities such as playing outside or reading books. In addition, parents also provide examples of wise gadget use. With this guidance, Ananda R can develop well, have fluent communication skills, understand various basic concepts, and learn to regulate their emotions. So, parental involvement is the key to preventing children from becoming addicted to gadgets and continuing to grow into active, intelligent, and self-controlling children in today's digital era.

## **DECLARATIONS**

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