International Journal of Technology in Education and Science

www.ijtes.net

Parenting in the Digital Age: Parents' Experiences of Primary School Children's Technology Use

Sunay Özşahin [1] *, Tülin Şener [2]

[1] Research Assistant, PhD, Guidance and Psychological Counseling Program, Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Education, Kırıkkale University, Türkiye, 0000-0003-2093-5965
[2] Professor, Educational Psychology, Department of Educational Sciences, Faculty of Education, Ankara University, Türkiye, 0000-0002-6190-5423
* Corresponding author: Sunay Özşahin (sunayozsahin@kku.edu.tr)

Article Info

Article History

Received:
15 June 2026

Revised:
8 September 2026

Accepted:
1 October 2026

Published:
15 October 2026

Keywords

Digital parenting
Parental mediation
Digital media
Technology use
Primary school

Abstract

This study aimed to examine in depth the digital parenting experiences of parents who had children attending primary school. The study was conducted as a case study within a qualitative research approach. The participants were 12 parents whose children were enrolled in Grades 1-4 during the 2022-2023 academic year. Data were collected through a personal information form and an open-ended interview form and were analyzed using descriptive analysis. Four main themes were identified, digital tools in children's lives, parental responses to children's digital tool use, the perceived effects of digital tools on children, and parents' own digital tool use. The findings showed that children were introduced to digital tools at approximately age two and commonly used smartphones, television, and tablets. Although parents supported children's beneficial use of digital tools, they were concerned about their children's possible exposure to risky situations in digital environments. Parents most often described themselves as having a guiding role in children's digital tool use, while some also emphasized consistency and tolerance in parenting behavior.

Citation: Özşahin S. & Şener, T. (2027). Parenting in the digital age: Parents' experiences of primary school children's technology use. *International Journal of Technology in Education and Science (IJTES), 11*(1), 150-165. https://doi.org/10.46328/ijtes.8831

ISSN: 2651-5369 / © International Journal of Technology in Education and Science (IJTES).
This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-SA license
(http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

OPEN ACCESS

Introduction

Digital technologies have substantially shaped the ways children learn, play, communicate, and spend their leisure time. The widespread presence of smartphones, tablets, and computers in everyday life has enabled children to access digital content at earlier ages and with greater ease. This situation offers opportunities such as access to information, diversification of learning resources, and development of digital skills, while also raising concerns about exposure to inappropriate content, excessive screen use, online risks, and weakened family communication (Livingstone et al., 2017; Smahel et al., 2020). In this respect, children's digital tool use cannot be addressed only as a matter of reducing screen time or protecting children from risks, parental guidance is central to helping children learn to use digital tools productively.

Digital parenting has emerged as an important domain of parenting because children require guidance in digital environments. It includes helping children select appropriate content, using digital tools together with them, informing and protecting them against possible online risks, and supporting their functional use of these tools. It also requires parents to establish a coherent approach that is consistent with their own digital tool use behaviors (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020; Nikken & Schols, 2015).

In the present study, digital parenting is conceptualized not merely as keeping children away from digital tools because they are risky, but as a developmental area in which children need appropriate guidance and functional use skills. Current reports on children and technology indicate that keeping children completely away from the digital world is not realistic, instead, high-quality use, parental guidance, and a balanced relationship with technology are emphasized (OECD, 2025; UNICEF, 2017). From this perspective, digital parenting means enabling children to benefit safely from the opportunities offered by digital tools by learning how to use them appropriately rather than simply preventing their use.

The approaches parents use in this process are explained through the concept of parental mediation. Active mediation, restrictive mediation, co-use, and technical monitoring are among the strategies that constitute parental mediation (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Valkenburg et al., 1999). Restrictive mediation involves setting limits on children's digital tool use in terms of time, content, or access, whereas active mediation involves explaining digital content and providing guidance through communication with the child. Co-use refers to parents' use of digital tools together with children in ways that provide guidance and modeling (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Zaman et al., 2016). However, exclusively restrictive approaches may reduce children's access to digital opportunities, whereas guidance-oriented and supportive approaches may be more functional in developing children's digital skills (Livingstone et al., 2017). Therefore, balanced parental mediation is important for supporting children's healthy relationship with digital tools.

Primary school is a critical period for digital parenting. During this period, children encounter situations such as learning to read and write, conducting research, and completing online homework, all of which may also expose them to digital risks. For this reason, parents need to guide children toward productive use and protect them from risks not only by setting limits, but also by adopting co-use and explanatory guidance strategies (Livingstone et

al., 2017; Smahel et al., 2020). Studies showing that exposure to digital tools begins at early ages indicate that children in this age group have an undeniable need for parental guidance (Kabali et al., 2015; Lauricella et al., 2015).

Parents may make decisions about children's digital tool use in relation to daily caregiving demands, domestic responsibilities, fatigue, parents' work and communication needs, and children's need to calm down. Previous studies have shown that parents may permit children's digital tool use to complete their own tasks or obtain short-term relief (Geurts et al., 2022; Lev & Elias, 2020; Radesky, Peacock-Chambers, et al., 2016). Accordingly, evaluations of digital parenting should consider the family's living conditions rather than focusing only on individual parental attitudes.

Parents' own attitudes and behaviors regarding digital tool use are also influential in children's digital tool use. The interruption of parent-child interaction because parents are occupied with phones, social media, or other online content is explained through the concept of technoference, which may shape children's relationship with digital tools (McDaniel & Radesky, 2018; Radesky, Kistin, et al., 2016). Thus, parents need to be aware of their own digital tool use while regulating the child's relationship with digital tools.

The digital parenting literature includes a broad body of research on screen time, online risks, parental mediation, and digital skills. Much of this literature is based on quantitative measurement. In their systematic review, Modecki et al. (2022) reported 145 quantitative studies in the field of digital parenting, compared with 49 studies with a qualitative focus. This distribution indicates that measurement-based knowledge in the field is strong, but that further qualitative research is still needed to understand what parents feel when setting limits, under what everyday conditions they allow digital tool use, how they balance benefits and risks, and how they interpret their own digital behaviors. Qualitative research makes it possible to discuss these experiences not only as relationships between variables, but also at the level of context, emotion, justification, and meaning (Geurts et al., 2022; Smahelova et al., 2017; Zaman et al., 2016).

The purpose of this study was to examine the digital parenting experiences of parents with children in primary school through qualitative interviews. The study considered children's digital tool use, parents' emotional and behavioral responses to that use, parents' evaluations of the benefits and risks of digital tools for children, and the relationship between parents' own digital tool use and their parenting processes. In this respect, the study is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of digital parenting in the context of parents' everyday experiences, family relationships, and digital risks and opportunities. The study addressed the following research question: What are parents' experiences and views regarding their digital parenting processes?

Method

Research Design

The study aimed to understand the digital parenting experiences of parents who had children in Grades 1-4 within their own contexts. Therefore, the study was conducted as a case study within a qualitative research approach. A

case study enables the examination of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context by considering participant experiences and contextual conditions together (Yin, 2018). In this study, the case under investigation was parents' experiences, meaning-making processes, and guidance practices in response to the digital tool use of primary school children.

Study Group

The study group consisted of 12 parents who had children in Grades 1-4 during the 2022-2023 academic year and agreed to participate in the interviews. Participants were selected through criterion sampling and snowball sampling. The demographic characteristics of the study group are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Variables	Category	f
Interviewed parent	Mother	7
Interviewed parent	Father	5
Age	30-35	1
Age	36-40	6
Age	41-45	4
Age	46-50	1
Educational level	Primary education	4
Educational level	High school	4
Educational level	Undergraduate degree	3
Educational level	Graduate degree	1
Length of marriage	5-10 years	1
Length of marriage	11-15 years	5
Length of marriage	16-20 years	4
Length of marriage	21 years and above	2
Occupation	Homemaker	4
Occupation	Dentist	2
Occupation	Civil servant	2
Occupation	Psychological counselor	1
Occupation	Tradesperson	1
Number of children	2	5
Number of children	3	7

Data Collection Instruments

A personal information form and an interview form were used as data collection instruments. The personal information form was prepared to determine participants' sociodemographic characteristics. It included questions about gender, age, educational level, length of marriage, employment status, occupation, and number of children.

Qualitative data were collected through an open-ended interview form developed to examine parents' digital parenting experiences in depth. The interview form consisted of 10 open-ended questions designed to obtain information about parents' and children's digital tool use, the effects of digital tools on the parent-child relationship, the situations in which parents resorted to digital tools, the difficulties parents experienced while managing digital tool use, and the parenting roles they assumed during this process.

During the preparation of the interview form, the relevant literature was first reviewed, and draft questions were then developed by drawing on findings obtained in the quantitative phase of the broader research. The draft form was submitted to two academics experienced in qualitative research for expert review. In line with their recommendations, some questions were revised to make them clearer in terms of language and scope. For example, the expression "when you cannot prevent your child from using digital tools" was revised as "when you cannot set limits", the expression "what do you and your spouse do" was revised as "what kinds of roles do you assume", and the question "What do you think about digital tools?" was revised as "What do you think about the benefits and harms of digital tools?"

To evaluate the clarity and functionality of the interview form, pilot interviews were conducted with three parents who had primary school-age children. The form was finalized based on feedback from the pilot interviews and was then used in the data collection process.

Data Collection Procedure

The participants were 12 parents who had children in primary school and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. Participants were identified through convenience case sampling in line with the purpose of the study. The interviews were conducted face to face in the researcher's psychological counseling office.

Before the interviews, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the interview process, the use of the data, and confidentiality principles. They were told that the interviews would be recorded for analysis, that the information they shared would be used only for scientific purposes, that their identifying information would be kept confidential, and that they would be represented anonymously in the research report. After this explanation, voluntary consent was obtained from the participants. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes.

After the interviews were completed, an informative brochure prepared by the researcher was shared with participants to support their awareness of digital parenting. This practice was carried out after data collection to help parents access accurate information about digital parenting experiences.

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the interviews were first transferred to a computer environment and organized for analysis. Descriptive analysis was used to analyze the data. Accordingly, participants' responses to each interview question

were evaluated together, and expressions that carried semantic integrity were identified and coded. Care was taken to ensure that the codes directly and clearly reflected participant statements.

During coding, codes with similar meanings were grouped to form subthemes. The subthemes were organized under main themes by considering the research question and the structure of the interview form. In this way, the data were systematically classified at the levels of main theme, subtheme, code, and frequency. Frequency values were calculated to show how often the codes appeared in participant statements; however, these values were not used for quantitative generalization. Instead, they were treated as supplementary information that supported the descriptive visibility of the findings. Theme, subtheme, code, and frequency values are presented in tables in the findings section. Direct participant quotations explaining the related themes are provided after the tables. To protect participant confidentiality, quotations were coded as P1, P2, P3, and so forth.

Expert review was used to support the reliability of the analysis. In this process, 71 codes identified by the researcher, together with the theme and subtheme structure, were submitted to an academic expert in qualitative research. The expert was asked to match the codes with the relevant theme and subtheme structure. The researcher's and expert's matches were compared, and inter-coder agreement was calculated using the formula proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994): reliability = agreement / (agreement + disagreement).

The comparison showed agreement on 69 of the 71 coding decisions and disagreement on two. The disagreements concerned the codes "anger" and "trying to understand." The expert evaluated these codes as behavioral responses. When the participant statements were re-examined, however, these expressions were found to reflect emotional states rather than direct actions, and the codes were therefore placed under affective responses. Accordingly, the inter-coder agreement coefficient was calculated as 69/(69+2) = .97. This value was considered above the acceptable level of agreement in qualitative research.

Results

The findings are presented in line with the case study design, not only through frequency values, but also through recurring patterns of meaning in parents' narratives. The interpretations consider the context of participant statements, their emotional tone, and their meaning for digital parenting.

Digital Tools in Children’s Lives

The first main theme identified from the data was digital tools in children's lives. The subthemes, codes, and frequencies related to this theme are presented in Table 2. The table shows that digital tools enter children's everyday lives at early ages and through multiple devices. In participant narratives, initial exposure to digital tools most often began around age two, and smartphones and television were the most frequently mentioned tools. This finding suggests that digital tools are not only objects of entertainment for children but also serve practical functions within family routines. P2 reported that the child was calmed with television and a phone when "crying" or when the parent had work to do. P9's statement that the child was given a phone to reduce restlessness while

the family was together supported the same pattern.

Table 2. Digital Tools in Children's Lives

Subtheme	Codes	f
Initial exposure to digital tools	Age 2	6
Initial exposure to digital tools	Age 5	3
Initial exposure to digital tools	Age 3	2
Initial exposure to digital tools	1 st grade	1
Digital tools used	Smartphone	9
Digital tools used	Television	9
Digital tools used	Tablet	8
Digital tools used	Computer	2
Duration of use	1 hour	6
Duration of use	2 hours	5
Duration of use	3 hours	1
Purpose of use	Playing games	8
Purpose of use	Watching videos	7
Purpose of use	Homework research	5
Purpose of use	Online lessons	2
Purpose of use	Keeping occupied	1
Socioeconomic status	No effect	4
Socioeconomic status	Urban life	4
Socioeconomic status	Greater financial means increase access	4
Activities when not using digital tools	Playing	8
Activities when not using digital tools	Reading books	6
Activities when not using digital tools	Doing homework	4
Activities when not using digital tools	Drawing	1
Activities when not using digital tools	Helping mother	1

In terms of purpose of use, playing games, watching videos, and doing homework research were prominent. P8's statement that the child used the phone for games because it contained "things that attract more interest" indicates the strong appeal of digital tools for children. P1 stated that the child could use digital tools for a very long time if permitted, but that use was limited to certain daily times. These narratives show that parents do not reject digital tools entirely, rather, they try to manage use in terms of duration, purpose, and conditions.

Statements about socioeconomic conditions showed that access to digital tools was not perceived as limited only to higher-income families. P5 stated that even when a computer or smartphone is not available, television is present in many homes. This statement suggests that digital media can enter children's lives through different tools at different levels of opportunity. The fact that children turned to activities such as playing, reading, doing homework, and drawing when they were not using digital tools also indicates that non-digital activities can remain

strong alternatives when parental guidance is present. The prominent result in this theme is that digital tools have a place in children's lives, but the quality of that place is shaped by family boundaries, alternative activities, and parental guidance.

Parental Responses to Digital Tool Use

The second main theme identified in the study was parental responses to digital tool use. The subthemes, codes, and frequencies for this theme are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Parental responses to digital use

Subtheme	Codes	f
Affective responses	Happiness	8
Affective responses	Anger	5
Affective responses	Inadequacy	5
Affective responses	Sadness	4
Affective responses	Anxiety	4
Affective responses	Tension	4
Affective responses	Guilt	2
Affective responses	Uneasiness	1
Affective responses	Trying to understand	1
Behavioral responses	Limiting	5
Behavioral responses	Persuading	3
Behavioral responses	Warning	2
Behavioral responses	Hiding	1
Behavioral responses	Taking away by force	1
Behavioral responses	Threatening prohibition	1

The second theme makes the emotional dimension of digital parenting visible. Parents stated that they mostly felt relief and happiness when children were not using digital tools, but experienced anger, anxiety, inadequacy, guilt, and tension when use increased or became difficult to control. P1's statement that the child did "better things" when not using a phone or tablet suggests that the parent perceived non-digital activities as developmentally safer. P5's statement that feeling ignored by the child led to guilt shows that children's digital tool use becomes intertwined with parents' perception of parenting competence.

Participant statements also showed that parental responses did not remain only at the emotional level but turned into behavioral strategies. Parents used methods such as limiting, persuading, warning, hiding the device, taking it away by force, and threatening prohibition. P3's explanation that the parent turned off the television by directing the child's attention to different games reflects a practical transition between restriction, explanation, and offering alternatives. P7's statement that "we give a certain amount of time and try to monitor it" shows that digital parenting is carried out in daily life through setting and monitoring time limits.

This theme indicates that parental responses cannot be reduced to a simple binary of permission or prohibition. While trying to protect the child and manage duration of use, parents also cope with emotions such as guilt, inadequacy, and anxiety. Therefore, digital parenting support should not be limited to technical monitoring skills. It should also include consistent limit setting, explaining decisions to the child, developing alternative activities, and helping parents manage their own emotional burden.

Perceived Effects of Digital Tools on Children

The third main theme was the perceived effects of digital tools on children. The subthemes, codes, and frequencies related to this theme are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Perceived effects on children

Subtheme	Codes	f
Benefits	Easy access to information	6
Benefits	Research	5
Benefits	Online education	2
Benefits	Keeping up with technology	1
Benefits	Educational games	1
Benefits	Career acquisition	1
Benefits	Ease of communication	1
Harms	Reduced socialization	4
Harms	Fear-inducing content	2
Harms	Increased aggression	2
Harms	Addiction	1
Harms	Misinformation	1
Harms	Musculoskeletal problems	1
Harms	Psychological distress	1

The third theme shows that parents did not view digital tools as one-sidedly harmful or beneficial. Participants mentioned benefits such as easy access to information, research, online education, educational games, ease of communication, and keeping up with technology. P6's statement that access to information has become much easier than in the past suggests that digital tools are seen as expanding learning resources for children. P12's description of digital platforms as "like a library" when used in a controlled way also clearly reveals the positive use dimension of digital parenting.

At the same time, participants drew attention to risks such as reduced socialization, exposure to frightening content, increased aggression, addiction, misinformation, physical posture problems, and psychological distress. P1's statement that the child could encounter frightening content that should not be seen shows parents' concern about content safety. P10's view that digital tools may distance the child from social life indicates that duration of use should be balanced with relationships outside the family and with peers.

The key point in this theme is that digital parenting is not only about avoiding risks, but also about managing opportunities. Participants did not reject digital tools completely; rather, they were concerned about uncontrolled, purposeless, and insufficiently monitored use. Children's ability to benefit from the educational and informative aspects of digital tools is closely related to parents' content selection, co-use, explanatory guidance, and ability to balance time.

Parents' Digital Tool Use

The fourth main theme in the study was parents' digital tool use. The subthemes, codes, and frequencies related to this theme are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Parents' digital tool use

Subtheme	Codes	f
Purpose of use	Seeking information	9
Purpose of use	Social media	7
Purpose of use	Communication	5
Purpose of use	Trivial browsing	4
Purpose of use	Recipes	1
Purpose of use	Studying	1
Effects on children	Modeling	10
Effects on children	Distancing	1
Effects on parenting behavior	No effect	5
Effects on parenting behavior	No attending to children	4
Effects on parenting behavior	Positive	1
Effects on parenting behavior	Wasted time	1
Roles	Guiding	4
Roles	Consistency	2
Roles	Turning a blind eye	2
Roles	Rule-oriented	1
Roles	Flexible	1
Roles	Intervention	1

The fourth theme shows that digital parenting is closely related to parents' own digital tool use. Parents reported using digital tools mostly for obtaining information, social media, communication, recipes, studying, and short-term relaxation. P2's statement that the parent checked the phone for social media during the day and P5's statement that entertaining content provided relief during job-related stress indicate that digital tools can also serve both functional and emotional regulation purposes for adults.

One of the most prominent points of awareness among participants was that children model parental behavior. P3 stated that when the parent became absorbed in the phone, the children noticed, and the parent then tried to put

the phone away and strengthen communication with them. P7 emphasized that adults also need limits by noting that increased personal use led to insufficient attention to the children. These statements show that digital parenting is not limited to setting rules for the child, it also requires parents to regulate their own digital behaviors.

The conclusion indicated by this theme is that children's digital use cannot be evaluated in isolation within the family. The parent's relationship with the phone affects the credibility of rules given to the child, the quality of family communication, and modeled behaviors regarding digital tools. In digital parenting, consistency is therefore possible not only by monitoring the child's time, but also by reviewing parents' own digital boundaries.

Discussion

This study focused on how parents with primary school children experience digital parenting in everyday family life. When the findings are considered together, digital parenting appears to be more than an effort to reduce screen time or protect children from online risks. Parents viewed digital tools as necessary for learning, access to information, and adaptation to technology, while also expressing concerns about uncontrolled use, inappropriate content, social withdrawal, and their own parenting competence. This result is consistent with studies that conceptualize digital parenting as a two-sided parenting domain involving both risks and opportunities (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020; Modecki et al., 2022; OECD, 2025).

The first finding showed that children were introduced to digital tools at early ages, mostly through smartphones, television, and tablets. This result is consistent with Kabali et al. (2015), who reported that mobile devices enter young children's lives early. Lauricella et al. (2015) also stated that children's screen time is related to parents' media use, beliefs about media, and home routines. In the present study, the use of digital tools for games, watching videos, and homework research shows that digital media is positioned in children's lives as both entertainment and learning tools. The critical point is that digital parenting cannot be reduced to the effort to keep children away from digital tools. The central issue is how families can sustainably regulate the purpose, content, and guidance under which digital tools are used.

Parents' use of digital tools to keep children occupied, calm them down, or continue their own tasks shows that digital parenting is not independent of family needs. Geurts et al. (2022) found that parents sometimes allowed children's media use to regulate their own time, avoid conflict, or complete other tasks. Similarly, Lev and Elias (2020) stated that digital media becomes intertwined with caregiving, soothing, and time management in parenting routines during early childhood. In this study, parents' tendency to turn to digital tools when the child was restless or when domestic tasks needed to continue indicates that digital tool use cannot be sufficiently explained only through parental attitude. From this perspective, digital parenting cannot be understood without considering families' time pressure, caregiving burden, and emotional fatigue.

The second dimension of the findings concerns the emotional burden parents experience in relation to digital tool use. The presence of emotions such as happiness, anxiety, anger, guilt, and inadequacy within the same theme shows that digital parenting is not composed only of behavioral strategies. Radesky, Kistin, et al., (2016) similarly

found that parents expressed both relieving and exhausting aspects of remaining connected through digital tools. In the present study, parents' feelings of guilt or inadequacy when they could not control children's digital tool use suggest that digital parenting can sometimes be experienced as a test of parenting competence. Therefore, programs for parents should address not only what parents should do, but also what they feel during this process. Parents' use of strategies such as limiting, persuading, warning, and sometimes prohibiting is compatible with the parental mediation literature. Valkenburg et al. (1999) discussed restrictive, active, and social co-viewing approaches in the context of television mediation. Livingstone and Helsper (2008) extended this framework to children's internet use. However, digital environments are more interactive, personalized, and portable than television viewing. For this reason, contemporary parental mediation cannot be understood only as rule setting (Clark, 2011; Jiow et al., 2017). In this study, parents' efforts to persuade the child, redirect attention to other activities, and set time limits show that digital parenting continues within everyday relationship management.

The findings also suggest that restrictive strategies alone are not sufficient. Livingstone et al. (2017) emphasized that efforts to reduce digital risks may limit children's access to digital opportunities and that guidance-oriented strategies that support digital skills are therefore important. In the present study, parents' mention of benefits such as access to information, research, and online education strengthens the positive use dimension of digital parenting. Therefore, the parent's primary task is not to prohibit digital tools entirely, but to develop practices such as selecting quality content, using digital tools together, guiding through conversation, and setting consistent limits so children can benefit from digital tools for learning and development.

The third theme shows that parents considered the benefits and harms of digital tools together. This result is consistent with the opportunity-risk balance in the digital childhood literature. UNICEF (2017) stated that digital technologies offer children opportunities for education, participation, and access to information, but that these opportunities should be evaluated together with inequalities, safety risks, and lack of guidance. OECD (2025) similarly recommends addressing protection and empowerment approaches together in children's digital lives. The contribution of the present study is that it demonstrates this balance as a real-life situation for parents. Parents try to establish this balance through concrete everyday experiences such as the child doing homework research, wanting to play games, encountering frightening content, or reduced family communication.

The fourth finding shows that parents were aware that their own digital tool use was modeled by children. This result reminds us that in digital parenting, parents are not only supervisors, but also actors who are observed and imitated. McDaniel and Radesky (2018) explained parent-child interaction interrupted by parental technology use through the concept of technoference and noted its possible relationship with child behavior. In this study, some parents' statements that phone use reduced their attention to the child and that children noticed this strengthened the self-regulation dimension of digital parenting. When parents set time limits for the child but do not limit their own use, the consistency and credibility of rules about digital tool use within the family may be weakened.

The qualitative design of the study is meaningful in this regard. Quantitative studies are strong in making visible relationships among screen time, device type, parental attitudes, and mediation strategies. However, qualitative data are needed to understand why parents give a phone to the child, what they feel afterward, under what

conditions they can set limits, and how they behave when they become aware of their own phone use. The predominance of quantitative studies in Modecki et al.'s (2022) systematic review makes the qualitative contribution of the present study more visible. Zaman et al. (2016) and Smahelova et al. (2017) showed that parental mediation practices vary according to household conditions and the parent-child relationship. The present study provides a clear picture of this issue in the Turkish context through the digital tool use of primary school children.

A practical implication of these findings is the need to broaden the scope of digital parenting education. It is not sufficient to inform parents only about screen-time limits or technical control applications. Training should address multiple variables together, including learning, research, communication, digital literacy opportunities, age-appropriate content selection, co-use, talking with children about digital content, planning alternative activities, regulating parents' own digital use, and maintaining consistency within the family. Such an approach offers a balanced framework that supports children in benefiting from the digital world safely and consciously, rather than adopting either completely permissive or completely prohibitive positions.

Conclusion

This study revealed that the digital parenting experiences of parents with primary school children have a multidimensional structure. The findings indicate that children are introduced to digital tools at an early age and use them mainly for playing games, watching videos, and conducting homework-related research. These results show that digital media has become a visible and routine part of children’s everyday lives. Although parents recognize the benefits of digital tools in terms of access to information and learning opportunities, they also express concerns about excessive use, exposure to inappropriate content, reduced social interaction, and behavioral changes.

One of the most important conclusions of this study is that digital parenting cannot be understood solely as a matter of setting limits. Rather, digital parenting involves multiple and interrelated processes, including enabling children to benefit from digital tools, reducing potential risks, monitoring the purpose and content of use, explaining parental decisions, offering alternative activities, maintaining consistency within the family, and regulating parents’ own digital behaviors. Therefore, digital parenting should be conceptualized within a broad framework that includes empowerment as well as protection, guidance as well as control, and opportunities for high-quality digital engagement as well as restriction. This study is limited to the experiences of 12 parents within a qualitative case study design. Nevertheless, the findings provide meaningful insights into the contextual factors underlying parents’ decisions about their children’s digital tool use and contribute to a deeper understanding of digital parenting in the primary school period.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, support programs for parents should go beyond general screen-time recommendations. Such programs should include digital content literacy, co-use practices, communication with children about digital

experiences, support for learning-oriented digital use, household rules regarding digital tools, and parents' awareness of their own digital behaviors. In this way, parents can be supported not only in preventing potential risks but also in guiding children toward more conscious, balanced, and productive digital engagement. Schools and psychological counseling units may play an important role in this process by providing parents with practical guidance and concrete examples. These examples may focus on how children can use digital tools for homework, research, production, creativity, and safe communication. Parent education programs may also emphasize consistency within the family, age-appropriate rules, and the importance of parental modeling in children's digital habits. Future studies may expand the scope of the current research by including children's perspectives, teacher observations, and families from different socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, comparative and longitudinal studies may help explain how digital parenting practices change over time and how these practices are associated with children's academic, social, and emotional development.

Statements and Declarations

Acknowledgments/Notes: This article was derived from Sunay Özşahin's doctoral dissertation titled "İlkokul Döneminde Çocuğu Olan Ebeveynlerin Dijital Ebeveynlik Farkındalıkları [Digital Parenting Awareness of Parents with Children in Primary School]" completed in 2024 at Ankara University, Graduate School of Educational Sciences, Department of Educational Sciences, Türkiye.

During the preparation of this manuscript, generative AI was used only to support English translation, language editing, and proofreading. The author(s) reviewed and edited the text and take full responsibility for the final content.

Supplementary Materials: Not applicable.

Author Contributions: The first author conducted the doctoral dissertation on which this article is based and prepared the initial draft of the manuscript. The second author supervised the dissertation process and contributed to the conceptualization, methodological guidance, and critical revision of the manuscript. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: Not applicable.

Data Availability: The data that support the findings of this study are not publicly available due to privacy and ethical restrictions concerning the qualitative interview data.

Ethics Approval: The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Ankara University (Approval No. 285, Date: 19 December 2022). All methods were performed in accordance with the approved study protocol and relevant ethical guidelines and regulations.

Informed Consent: Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study. The consent form

stated that participation was voluntary, confidentiality would be ensured, and participants' personal information would not be disclosed.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

References

Clark, L. S. (2011). Parental mediation theory for the digital age. *Communication Theory, 21*(4), 323–343. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2011.01391.x

Geurts, S. M., Koning, I. M., Vossen, H., & van den Eijnden, R. J. J. M. (2022). A qualitative study on children's digital media use and parents' self-interest. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 31*(7), 2015-2026. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-021-02074-3

Jiow, H. J., Lim, S. S., & Lin, J. (2017). Level up! Refreshing parental mediation theory for our digital media landscape. *Communication Theory, 27*(3), 309-328. https://doi.org/10.1111/comt.12109

Kabali, H. K., Irigoyen, M. M., Nunez-Davis, R., Budacki, J. G., Mohanty, S. H., Leister, K. P., & Bonner, R. L., Jr. (2015). Exposure and use of mobile media devices by young children. *Pediatrics, 136*(6), 1044-1050. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2015-2151

Lauricella, A. R., Wartella, E., & Rideout, V. J. (2015). Young children's screen time: The complex role of parent and child factors. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 36*, 11-17. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2014.12.001

Lev, Y. B., & Elias, N. (2020). Digital parenting: Media uses in parenting routines during the first two years of life. *Studies in Media and Communication, 8*(2), 41-48. https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v8i2.5050

Livingstone, S., & Blum-Ross, A. (2020). *Parenting for a digital future: How hopes and fears about technology shape children's lives.* Oxford University Press.

Livingstone, S., & Helsper, E. J. (2008). Parental mediation of children's internet use. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 52(*4), 581-599. https://doi.org/10.1080/08838150802437396

Livingstone, S., Ólafsson, K., Helsper, E. J., Lupiáñez-Villanueva, F., Veltri, G. A., & Folkvord, F. (2017). Maximizing opportunities and minimizing risks for children online: The role of digital skills in emerging strategies of parental mediation. *Journal of Communication, 67*(1), 82-105. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12277

McDaniel, B. T., & Radesky, J. S. (2018). Technoference: Parent distraction with technology and associations with child behavior problems. *Child Development, 89*(1), 100-109. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12822

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Modecki, K. L., Goldberg, R. E., Wisniewski, P., & Orben, A. (2022). What is digital parenting? A systematic review of past measurement and blueprint for the future. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 17*(6), 1673-1691. https://doi.org/10.1177/17456916211072458

Nikken, P., & Schols, M. (2015). How and why parents guide the media use of young children. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 24*(11), 3423-3435. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-015-0144-4

OECD. (2025). *How's life for children in the digital age?* OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/0854b900-

en

Radesky, J. S., Kistin, C. J., Eisenberg, S., Gross, J., Block, G., Zuckerman, B., & Silverstein, M. (2016). Parent perspectives on their mobile technology use: The excitement and exhaustion of parenting while connected. *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics, 37*(9), 694-701. https://doi.org/10.1097/DBP.0000000000000357

Radesky, J. S., Peacock-Chambers, E., Zuckerman, B., & Silverstein, M. (2016). Use of mobile technology to calm upset children. *JAMA Pediatrics, 170*(4), 397-399. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2015.4260

Smahel, D., Machackova, H., Mascheroni, G., Dedkova, L., Staksrud, E., Ólafsson, K., Livingstone, S., & Hasebrink, U. (2020). *EU Kids Online 2020: Survey results from 19 countries.* EU Kids Online. https://doi.org/10.21953/lse.47fdeqj01ofo

Smahelova, M., Juhová, D., Cermak, I., & Smahel, D. (2017). Mediation of young children's digital technology use: The parents' perspective. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace, 11*(3), Article 4. https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2017-3-4

UNICEF. (2017). *The State of the World's Children 2017: Children in a digital world.* https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-worlds-children-2017

Valkenburg, P. M., Krcmar, M., Peeters, A. L., & Marseille, N. M. (1999). Developing a scale to assess three styles of television mediation: Instructive mediation, restrictive mediation, and social coviewing. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 43*(1), 52-66. https://doi.org/10.1080/08838159909364474

Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Zaman, B., Nouwen, M., Vanattenhoven, J., de Ferrerre, E., & Van Looy, J. (2016). A qualitative inquiry into the contextualized parental mediation practices of young children's digital media use at home. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 60*(1), 1-22. https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2015.1127240