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Democratic Parenting Patterns Regarding Smartphone Use in Children in Lingkungan 18 Binjai

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Abstract: This study investigates the application of democratic parenting in managing children's smartphone use in Lingkungan 18 Binjai, Indonesia. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, data were obtained through in-depth interviews with three informants whose children actively interacted with smartphones. To ensure data credibility, triangulation and member checking techniques were applied. The results indicate that parents implemented democratic principles by setting clear time restrictions, selecting child-friendly applications such as YouTube Kids and educational games, and providing direct supervision. Smartphones were found to offer learning benefits, such as supporting early numeracy, enhancing memorization of Islamic songs, and stimulating cognitive development, yet also produced drawbacks including irritability, distraction, and screen dependency. The novelty of this study lies in uncovering culturally grounded strategies, including the integration of religious practices (Qur'an recitation and shalawat), the use of time-management tools like alarms, and the involvement of fathers in regulating digital activities. These findings extend the democratic parenting framework by demonstrating its adaptability within cultural and religious contexts, thereby offering both theoretical enrichment and practical implications for guiding children's technology use in the digital era.

Keywords: Children, Democratic Parenting Patterns, Smartphones.

INTRODUCTION

Initially, smartphones were introduced as long-distance communication tools that facilitated relationships between individuals (Nur & Melati, 2024). According to Paridawati et al. (2021), a smartphone is a mobile phone that has the capability to use and function like a computer and an example of the benefits of a smartphone from a software perspective is the availability of data access services. Its uses are very diverse, whether for searching for information, playing games, selling online or other entertainment (Rahmad, 2022). According to Newzoo data, Indonesia had 192.15 million smartphone users throughout 2022, ranking fourth in the world for smartphone users (Fajrussalam et al., 2023). Smartphone devices have also mushroomed in the environment, even children can access them (Zulftria, 2017). However, smartphone use among children is a double-edged sword. It has positive impacts, including providing new opportunities for exploration and discovery, offering challenging activities, responding to curiosity, fostering independence, providing entertaining and engaging games, stimulating young children, including those aged 2-3, to actively participate in learning, enhancing children's creativity, and increasing their interest in learning (Listiana et al., 2020).

But children who often use smartphones excessively will have a bad influence on their children (Ramadhani et al., 2020). The negative impact caused by children who are addicted to smartphones is that they tend to be indifferent and even angry when they receive orders from their parents (Laila & Astuti, 2024). Another negative impact experienced by children who use smartphones too often is that they are exposed to radiation which damages nerve tissue and the brain (Yumarni, 2022). Therefore, parents' role in raising their children is essential to prevent the negative impacts of smartphones. One way to do this is through the parenting styles they apply to their children. According to Elan & Handayani (2023), Parenting patterns are patterns of interaction between parents and children which include guidance, coaching and education carried out in daily life as an effort to help the child's growth and development process.

Children grow and develop under the care of their parents, including teaching them to adapt to the environment and get to know the world around them, because parents are the first foundation for children (Wijono

et al., 2021). There are three parenting styles generally applied by parents, namely democratic parenting, authoritarian parenting, and permissive parenting (Suryana & Sakti, 2022). Democratic parenting is a parenting style that applies treatment to children in order to shape the child's personality by prioritizing the interests of children who behave rationally or have thoughts (Rusmaladewi & Ananda, 2023). Authoritarian parenting is a parenting style that is the opposite of democratic parenting, namely it tends to set standards that must absolutely be followed, usually accompanied by threats (Bun et al., 2020). Permissive parenting is a parenting style characterized by parents not guiding their children and approving all of their children's behavior, including immediate desires, and not using punishment (Mustafa Parinduri & Irwan, 2024).

In the research conducted Sholikhah (2023) The interviews revealed two types of parenting styles. First, democratic parenting, which allows children to use smartphones under parental supervision. Second, permissive parenting, which allows children to use smartphones freely without parental supervision. Both styles yield different results for children's smartphone use. Children with democratic parenting tend to be less addicted to smartphones because they intersperse their playtime and learning with their parents, compared to those with permissive parenting. In line with the research conducted Al'fani et al. (2022) The interview results revealed that the application of a democratic parenting style is the best because parents are friendly to their children and allow them to express their own opinions. Parents are more willing to listen to their children's concerns and provide good input and advice. In this parenting style, parents prioritize their children's interests but don't hesitate to control them. They don't expect more than they can handle. Punishments are never harsh, and the approach is gentle. Children are still allowed to play with smartphones, but under parental supervision. Parents also enforce rules regarding smartphone use to prevent children from experiencing the negative impacts of smartphones. Therefore, the role of parents in regulating and supervising smartphone use is crucial. Implementing a democratic parenting style can prevent the negative impacts of smartphone use on children. Observations conducted in Lingkungan 18 Binjai, a residential area, revealed that the community, including children, is quite familiar with smartphone use. This suggests the need for an in-depth study of parents in the neighborhood and their efforts to implement democratic parenting practices regarding smartphone use with their children.

This study aims to describe the application of democratic parenting patterns in Lingkungan 18 Binjai concerning children's smartphone use, exploring the consequent impacts on children and the strategic approaches parents employ to manage this technology. While global research highlights the pervasive influence of smartphone use on family dynamics and child development (Swit et al., 2025), and prior Indonesian studies have explored its impact on family intimacy (Nabela & Rianto, 2020), there is a discernible research void regarding how specific parenting styles, particularly democratic approaches, manifest in response to this technological integration within distinct local contexts like Lingkungan 18 Binjai. This study specifically investigates the parental strategies for managing smartphone use among children within this unique setting, considering both the potential for developmental benefits and the risks of excessive engagement. This geographical focus allows for an in-depth understanding of how socio-cultural factors unique to Binjai shape parental perceptions and regulatory practices concerning children's digital engagement, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on technology's integration into family life beyond generalized Western contexts (Chatlina et al., 2024). This nuanced perspective allows for an examination of how parental democratic practices are adapted to mediate children's smartphone use, reflecting on the challenges parents face in balancing supervisory and restrictive mediation with the child's developmental needs.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method used is descriptive qualitative. According to Hanyfah et al. (2022), a research method based on descriptive data processing. Descriptive qualitative research is conducted to explain existing research without manipulating the data on the variables being studied through direct interviews. This research was conducted in Lingkungan 18 of Binjai Village, Medan Denai District. Three informants participated in the study, identified as MF, VA, and ASW. The informants were selected using purposive sampling, selecting subjects deemed to meet the research criteria.

The research employed three main data collection techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted through a non-participant approach, where the researcher directly observed the children's, smartphone use without being actively involved in their activities (Romdona et al., 2025). Interviews were carried out in a structured format, using the same set of questions across participants to maintain consistency (Trivaika & Senubekti, 2022). Documentation supported the process by gathering written sources

such as journals, theses, and research permits relevant to democratic parenting and smartphone use (Ardiansyah et al., 2023).

Participants were selected using a purposive sampling strategy, focusing on three parents who met specific criteria, namely, having direct and regular experience in supervising their children's smartphone use. While the sample size was limited, in depth qualitative inquiry prioritizes the richness of insights over numerical representation. Thus, the three informants were considered sufficient to provide meaningful perspectives aligned with the study's objectives (Mekarisce, 2020).

To ensure data credibility and validity, multiple strategies were applied. Data triangulation was conducted by cross checking observations, interviews, and documentation results to identify convergent patterns. Additionally, member checking was implemented by returning transcripts and preliminary interpretations to participants, enabling them to confirm or clarify the accuracy of information (Luthfiyani & Murhayati, 2024). These validation techniques helped minimize researcher bias and enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings of this study were obtained through structured interviews and observations of three parents in Lingkungan 18 Binjai who applied democratic parenting in managing their children's smartphone use. Participants were selected purposively to ensure that the cases studied were directly relevant to the research objectives.

1. Informant I

The interview with Informant I shows that democratic parenting plays a key role in regulating children's smartphone use. By setting time limits of 15–20 minutes and carefully selecting educational content, parents attempt to maximize positive impacts such as memorizing shalawat songs and recognizing animals. At the same time, they acknowledge the potential risks, such as tantrums and frustration triggered by advertisements. The parenting style applied is democratic, this can be seen by setting time limits but giving children the opportunity to play while learning to use smartphones. This balance between control and freedom is consistent with findings by Nihaya et al. (2024), who emphasized that democratic parenting enables children to gain educational benefits from gadgets while minimizing behavioral issues when guided appropriately.

Another point highlighted by Informant I is the strategy of replacing screen time with alternative activities, such as playing together, learning while playing, and engaging in religious practices like reciting the Qur'an. Such practices show that parents do not merely act as supervisors but also provide meaningful alternatives to reduce dependency on smartphones. Similar results were reported by Setiadi et al. (2024), who found that embedding cultural-religious values in parenting helps children redirect their focus from gadgets toward more constructive and value-based activities. Thus, the strategies of Informant I reflect both awareness of digital risks and a proactive effort to strengthen family interactions and moral development.

Overall, the parenting approach of Informant I illustrates that smartphones can become tools for both learning and distraction, depending on how parents manage their use. This aligns with the study of Nurhayati et al. (2025), which confirmed that parents who directly supervise and set rules tend to succeed in balancing the dual impact of smartphones on early childhood development. The findings from Informant I therefore reinforce the notion that democratic parenting, coupled with selective content curation and cultural values, can serve as an effective approach to mitigating the risks of smartphone exposure while enhancing its potential benefits.

2. Informant II

Informant II applied a democratic parenting style characterized by firmness combined with a caring attitude setting a clear time limit of 5–10 minutes, selecting educational applications, and explaining to the child the possible consequences of excessive smartphone use, such as eye irritation and nervous system disorders. The positive impact of this approach was that the child gained light educational benefits, such as learning to count, while the negative consequences included difficulties in maintaining focus and occasional mild tantrums when the device volume was too loud.

These findings are in line with the study by Sholikhah (2023), which showed that democratic parenting enables children to better understand screen time limitations through rational explanations, while parents actively supervise and direct the type of content accessed to remain educational. This approach helps children develop self-control and receive appropriate cognitive stimulation, provided that the frequency and duration of smartphone use are kept within reasonable limits.

Furthermore, Informant II emphasized the importance of providing alternative activities rooted in cultural and religious practices, such as singing, reciting the Qur'an, playing, and engaging in worship together, as a strategy to reduce children's dependency on smartphones. Similar results were reported by Yuyuk et al. (2023), who found that democratic parenting combined with moral and religious activities enables children to better regulate their time and prevents them from developing addictive patterns toward gadget use.

3. Informant III

Informant III's approach illustrates a democratic parenting style marked by clear rules, such as using alarms to monitor screen time (10–15 minutes) and personally supervising both content selection and usage. This approach resulted in learning benefits smartphones functioned as light educational tools, yet negative outcomes emerged, such as excessive screen fixation, close proximity to the device, and a lack of environmental awareness. To address these issues, the informant encouraged play, congregational prayer, and self-awareness, endeavoring not to use the smartphone as an escape, especially when the child sought attention.

These observations align with findings in recent Indonesian studies. For instance, Khaerini Rahmania et al. (2024) underscore that parents who actively supervise and guide their child's gadget use by setting limits, selecting age-appropriate content, and engaging directly with the child help foster healthier digital habits and prevent misuse or excessive screen engagement. This reflects a pattern where democratic, involved parenting can temper the risk of passive or obsessive gadget interaction.

Moreover, research by Wulandari et al. (2021) illustrates that active parental involvement, like guiding children on content, setting usage boundaries, and engaging alongside them, helps transform screen time into opportunities for learning and connection, rather than isolation. Informant III's strategies like redirecting attention through shared religious and social activities echo these findings: involvement and value-driven alternatives serve as protective measures against the adverse effects of excessive screen use.

Based on these findings, the interview results were organized systematically to highlight the similarities and differences among the three informants. A summary of the key information, including participants' background, smartphone usage patterns, observed impacts, and the strategies they employed in managing their children's digital habits can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview Results on Parenting Patterns and Children's Smartphone Use

	Informant I	Informant II	Informant III
Initials	MF	VA	ASW
Gender	Woman	Woman	Woman
Work	Housewife	Housewife and Entrepreneur	Housewife and Entrepreneur
Child Age	3 year old	7 year old	5 year old
Smartphone Usage	Duration 15-20 minutes Frequency is not often Applications used: Youtube Kids and Youtube	Duration 5-10 minutes Frequency is not often Applications used: YouTube Kids	Duration 10-15 minutes Frequency is not often Applications used: games and watching videos
Parenting Patterns	Democratic	Democratic	Democratic
Impact of Smartphone Usage	Positive impact: memorizing shalawat songs and recognizing various types of animals Negative impact: prone to tantrums, anger	Positive impact: light education and learning to count Negative impact: not focused when called, voice too loud and a bit of a tantrum	Positive impact: light education Negative impact: too focused on the layer, too close to the layer and not aware of the surrounding environment
Strategies to Overcome Smartphone Usage	Playing together, learning while playing, reciting the Qur'an, parents avoid playing with smartphones in	Singing, reciting the Qur'an, playing, praying, quality time with father, recreation	Playing together, praying in congregation, avoiding being busy alone so as not to

These findings collectively reveal that, although smartphone use supports early learning, it also introduces behavioral and social challenges. Parents responded through democratic strategies—balancing rules and supervision with alternatives that integrated cultural and religious values.

Discussion

Implementation of Democratic Parenting Patterns in Lingkungan 18 Binjai Regarding Smartphone Use in Children

The results of interviews with parents in Lingkungan 18 Binjai confirm that democratic parenting remains a relevant and effective approach in managing children's smartphone use. Parents consistently applied clear rules regarding duration ranging from 5 to 20 minutes while still allowing children limited autonomy to explore digital media. This finding illustrates that, rather than prohibiting smartphone use altogether, parents adopted a balanced strategy of negotiation and control. Similar conclusions were reported by Ayub et al. (2022), who emphasized that democratic parenting involves granting freedom within clear boundaries, which enables children to gradually develop self-regulation skills.

Interestingly, the participants in this study did not only impose rules but also explained the rationale behind restrictions, such as risks of eye strain or distraction. This aligns with the principles of active mediation in Parental Mediation Theory, where communication and reasoning are central to parental strategies (Iqbal et al., 2021). The ability of parents to combine authority with open dialogue reflects how democratic parenting can adapt to the digital environment, helping children understand technology's benefits and limitations rather than perceiving parental rules as arbitrary.

The Impact of Smartphone Use on Children

The findings further demonstrate that smartphones serve a dual role: they provide educational opportunities, such as supporting numeracy, religious memorization, and animal recognition, but also pose risks of irritability, distraction, and excessive attachment. This echoes Rusdiyanto et al. (2024), who showed that early exposure to educational apps can stimulate cognitive growth, while uncontrolled use can lead to behavioral and social emotional challenges.

However, this study contributes to a more nuanced interpretation. While previous studies often portray gadget use as either beneficial or harmful, the experiences of parents in Binjai highlight the conditional nature of these impacts. Smartphones become constructive tools only when embedded in a democratic parenting framework, characterized by active supervision, selective content choice, and integration with cultural values. This interpretation suggests that the quality of parental engagement mediates whether smartphones function as instruments of learning or as sources of disruption.

Parental Strategies for Addressing Smartphone Use

Another important finding is the variety of strategies parents used to minimize negative outcomes. These included setting alarms to manage screen time, redirecting children's attention to religious practices (reciting the Qur'an, shalawat, or congregational prayer), and encouraging quality time with fathers. Such practices go beyond the strategies identified in earlier studies, which typically emphasize technical supervision and content monitoring (Khaerini Rahmania et al., 2024). By embedding cultural and religious values into parenting, the participants expanded the scope of democratic parenting to fit the local socio-cultural context.

This enrichment demonstrates that democratic parenting is not a fixed model but rather a flexible framework that can incorporate context-specific values. In this case, the integration of religious practices reflects how Indonesian Muslim families adapt global parenting models to maintain cultural identity while addressing modern challenges. This offers a fresh perspective compared to prior studies, which rarely document localized cultural adaptations in parental mediation of technology.

When interpreted through Parental Mediation Theory, the findings suggest that active mediation combined with contextual strategies, such as cultural religious integration can significantly enhance children's ability to navigate technology responsibly. In democratic parenting, parental authority is not diminished but redefined through collaboration, communication, and the introduction of constructive alternatives. This study therefore extends the theoretical framework by showing that democratic parenting, when localized, provides not only behavioral regulation but also moral and cultural guidance in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

The application of democratic parenting by parents in Lingkungan 18 Binjai in dealing with smartphone use in children is done by providing controlled freedom, setting time rules, selecting educational content, and providing direct guidance. Smartphone use has positive impacts such as increasing children's knowledge through educational content but also has negative impacts such as being prone to tantrums, lack of focus, and dependence on screens. To overcome these impacts, parents implement various strategies such as playing and learning with their children, participating in religious activities, using alarms as time limits, and being a role model by limiting smartphone use in front of children. This approach shows that democratic parenting is effective in guiding children to use technology wisely.

While providing valuable insights into the application of democratic parenting, this study is constrained by several limitations that warrant consideration for future research. Firstly, the cross-sectional design employed precludes the establishment of causal relationships between democratic parenting practices and the observed outcomes in children's smartphone use, necessitating longitudinal investigations to corroborate these associations. Additionally, the study's focus on a singular parenting style overlooks the complex interplay of various parental approaches and their differential impacts on children's digital engagement, suggesting a need for comparative analyses across diverse parenting typologies. Moreover, the research did not explicitly capture the children's perspectives on their parents' device usage, future research should therefore incorporate direct input from children to provide a more holistic view of the parent-child technological interaction.

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