



Digital Era Counseling on the Use of Gawais in Early Childhood

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Abstract

Background: The rapid expansion of digital technology has profoundly influenced family life and early childhood development, particularly through the widespread use of gawais. While digital devices offer educational benefits, uncontrolled exposure during early childhood may lead to behavioral issues, reduced social interaction, and weakened emotional regulation. Many parents experience uncertainty and anxiety due to limited digital literacy and parenting guidance, highlighting the urgent need for structured community-based counseling to support responsible digital parenting.

Aims: This community service activity aimed to strengthen parents' understanding of appropriate gawai use in early childhood by promoting balanced digital parenting practices that support children's cognitive, social, and emotional development.

Methods: The program was implemented through interactive counseling sessions conducted at SD Negeri 1 Linggasari, targeting parents of early childhood students. Activities included presentations, guided discussions, and practical recommendations focusing on supervision strategies, time limitations, content selection, and positive parent-child communication. Program effectiveness was evaluated using a pretest-posttest design to measure changes in parental understanding.

Result: The results demonstrated a substantial improvement in parents' understanding following the counseling intervention. The mean pretest score of 55.0 increased to 85.0 in the posttest, indicating enhanced awareness and confidence in managing children's gawai use. Qualitative observations further revealed reduced parental anxiety and increased commitment to applying balanced digital parenting strategies at home.

Conclusion: The findings confirm that digital era counseling effectively translates educational urgency into meaningful learning outcomes for parents. This program offers promising prospects for wider implementation, longitudinal evaluation, and strengthened collaboration between families and educational institutions to foster healthy, ethical, and developmentally appropriate technology use in early childhood.

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INTRODUCTION

The education sector in Indonesia implements several education systems, one of which is Merdeka Belajar (Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024; Rahmiyati et al., 2024; Saa, 2024). This is related to the implementation of an education system that focuses on students' mindsets to think critically and to be able to solve problems independently (Nofamataro Zebua, 2025; Pangestu, 2024). However, there are often opposing views regarding the education system that is implemented. Those who express opposition are mostly parents or guardians of students. This can be caused by misunderstandings between parents and educators. Providing good education for children begins within the family (Danyluk, 2025; Handayani et al., 2021; Maemunah, 2023). However, parents or guardians often do not fully understand this. The importance of early childhood education requires approaches used in

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learning activities that focus attention on the child (Alghamdi, 2026; Hibana et al., 2024). Therefore, the first education for a child comes from their parents.

Within the family environment, parents, especially fathers as heads of the family, with the assistance of family members, must be able to prepare everything needed by a family (Kelty & Wakabayashi, 2020; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020). Such preparation includes guidance, encouragement, role modelling, and sometimes specific forms of discipline within a family, whether in the form of household activities, religious activities, or other social activities, which are borne by all family members collectively or individually, including interactions in family education (Arweck, 2022; Holt-Lunstad, 2024). The problem faced is that not all parents are able to become good educational resources for their children. This may be caused by limitations in knowledge, technology, and limited access to education experienced by parents or guardians. Not all parents have been able to receive education for up to twelve years, and some have even received less than six years of education (Balaj et al., 2021; Cep Kiki Kusumah, 2021; Osorio-Saez et al., 2021). Limited access to education experienced by parents is influenced by economic factors and transportation access to school locations.

The rapid development of technology at present has become a challenge for educators and parents. Future challenges are increasingly complex in relation to technological advancement and its impact on children's development (Clemente-Suárez et al., 2024; Mhlongo et al., 2023; Vedeckina & Borgonovi, 2021). Some parents are very pleased with the emergence of the digital generation. They realise the benefits of the digital era and the increase in productivity that can be obtained. Some parents respond to technological advancement with fear, anxiety, and paranoia (Drouin et al., 2020; Lund et al., 2024; Rohmah et al., 2024). Existing technological development can be very positive for progress in life. Its implementation in daily life is clearly visible. Education is an alternative form of positive habituation to develop good character in students so that they are not negatively influenced by technological advancement (Faiz et al., 2022; Lou & Xu, 2022). Therefore, education plays the most important role in educating children in the digital era. The primary education comes from the parents themselves.

As a solution to the existing problems, the authors carried out community service activities with the theme of educating children in the digital era. These activities serve as an initial concrete step to realise the hopes of parents. Teaching children about social norms in the digital era and preventing them from being carried away by negative influences from technological impacts. This education teaches children about politeness and attitudes towards others. Technology is like a double-edged sword. It is beneficial for those who use it wisely and harmful when it is not used properly.

The rapid expansion of digital technology has fundamentally reshaped patterns of communication, learning, and social interaction within families, particularly affecting early childhood development. In the digital era, gadgets have become easily accessible to young children, often without adequate supervision or guidance. While technology offers educational opportunities, uncontrolled and excessive use may lead to behavioral issues, reduced social interaction, and the erosion of values such as politeness, empathy, and self-regulation. Parents frequently experience confusion, anxiety, and uncertainty in responding to these challenges, especially when they lack sufficient digital literacy and parenting knowledge. This condition highlights an urgent need for structured community-based interventions that empower parents to guide children's digital engagement wisely, ensuring that technology supports rather than undermines children's holistic development.

In response to this urgency, the present community service activity was designed to provide digital era counseling for parents of early childhood students, focusing on responsible gadget use and positive parenting strategies. The primary objective of this program was to strengthen parents' understanding of balanced digital parenting, emphasizing open communication, supervision, time limitation, and the selection of age-appropriate and educational content. Beyond knowledge enhancement, the activity aimed to foster collaborative relationships between parents and educational institutions, positioning families as the first and most influential educators in children's lives. Through interactive counseling sessions, discussions, and practical guidance, this community service initiative sought to cultivate parental confidence and awareness, ultimately supporting the

development of children who are digitally literate, socially responsible, emotionally balanced, and firmly grounded in positive cultural and social values.

METHOD

The counselling activity carried out under the theme “Educating Children in the Digital Era” became the main activity in the community service conducted by the authors. This activity was held at SD Negeri 1 Linggasari, Wanadadi District, Banjarnegara Regency. The target of this counselling activity was parents or guardians of students at SD Negeri 1 Linggasari. The counselling activity with the theme “Educating Children in the Digital Era” aimed to provide understanding to parents regarding the importance of equipping children with good education as well as ways to educate children in an era of rapidly advancing technology. The increasingly sophisticated technological era certainly presents particular challenges for parents in educating their children. Not a few elementary school children behave impolitely towards people around them as a result of the influence of gadgets. Inappropriate content and the lack of parental supervision also contribute to this issue.

The counselling activity that was held is expected to help parents of students to act more wisely in facing technological advancement, especially the impacts it has on children. They are equipped with good parenting knowledge in order to create a positive relationship between children and parents. In addition, guidance is also provided regarding supervision of children when using gadgets, personal computers, or other technologies. Apart from preventing negative occurrences, this also provides positive impacts for children. Spending too much time looking at screens, especially for elementary school children, can lead to addiction and reduced focus. Parents who attended the counselling were given guidance to limit screen time for their children to a maximum (2 hours/day).

Parents were also given recommendations regarding appropriate activities for children when using gadgets. These include playing and learning through educational game applications, watching instructional videos related to school subjects, and using visual media to practise counting or reciting. Allowing children time to use technology does not mean parents should let them do so without supervision. Limits must be applied so that children do not become absorbed in technology. Parents should continue to provide time for children to socialise, talk with their parents, and play with peers without gadgets. Children should not become so immersed in technology that they are reluctant to meet others and avoid eye contact with their parents. Parents must always balance children’s physical playtime with the time they spend engaging with technology.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

To evaluate the effectiveness of the digital era counseling program, parents’ understanding of appropriate gawai use in early childhood was assessed using a pretest–posttest design. The assessment focused on parental knowledge of supervision strategies, time limitation, content selection, and the potential behavioral impacts of uncontrolled gadget use on young children (Table 1).

Table 1. Individual Pretest–Posttest Scores of Parental Understanding

Participant	Pre-test Score	Post-test Score
Parent 1	52	82
Parent 2	55	85
Parent 3	50	80
Parent 4	58	88
Parent 5	60	90
Parent 6	54	84
Parent 7	56	86
Parent 8	53	83
Parent 9	57	87
Parent 10	55	85

Source: Primary Data

The [Figure 1](#) presents the mean pretest score of 55.0 and the mean posttest score of 85.0, with error bars representing score variability. The thin bar with caps format highlights the magnitude and consistency of learning improvement among parents.

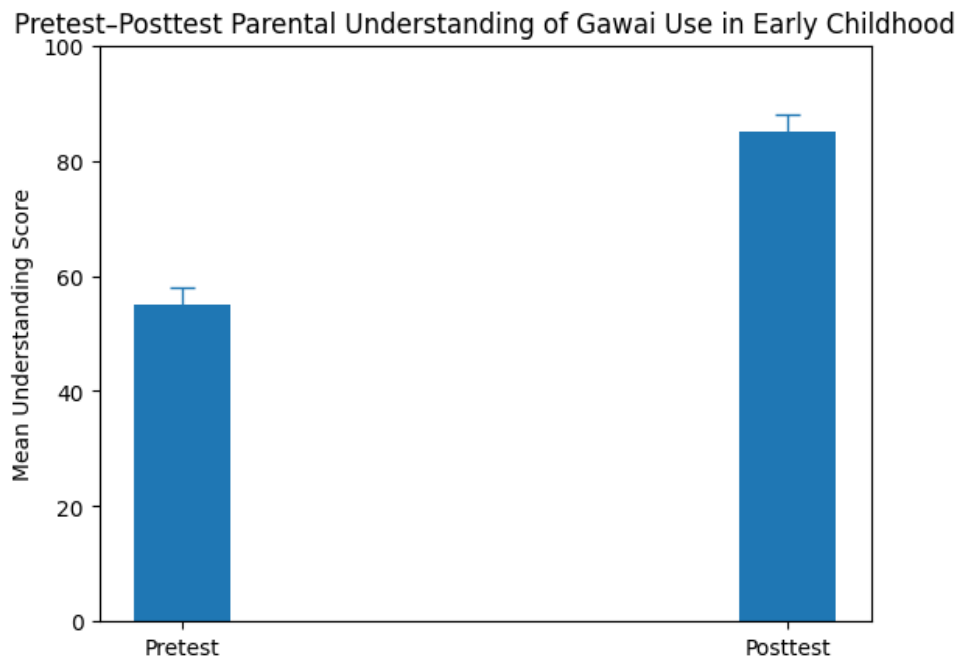


Figure 1. Mean Pretest–Posttest Parental Understanding of Gawai Use
Source: Primary Data

The results indicate a substantial increase in parental understanding following the counseling intervention. Prior to the activity, most parents demonstrated limited awareness of structured digital parenting practices, particularly regarding supervision, content filtering, and balanced screen time. After participating in the counseling sessions, parents showed markedly improved comprehension across all assessed domains. The consistency of posttest scores suggests that the counseling approach was effective for parents with diverse educational and experiential backgrounds. The interactive delivery method, which emphasized discussion, reflection, and practical examples, enabled parents to relate abstract digital parenting concepts to their everyday experiences. This learning process supported not only cognitive understanding but also emotional reassurance, reducing parental anxiety and increasing confidence in guiding children's digital behavior.

Synthesizing the individual and average results, the findings demonstrate that digital era counseling functions as an effective community service intervention for strengthening parental competence in managing gawai use among early childhood learners. The significant pretest–posttest improvement confirms that when parents are equipped with human-centered guidance and practical strategies, they are better prepared to balance technological exposure with children's social, emotional, and moral development. These results reinforce the importance of collaborative partnerships between parents and educational institutions in fostering healthy, responsible, and value-oriented digital engagement in early childhood.

Discussion

The counselling activity carried out at SD Negeri 1 Lingasari represents a positive step at the present time. Educating children in the digital era by applying parenting styles that are not authoritarian is important, because children do not like being forced but prefer to be persuaded and given some freedom, while still remaining under parental supervision ([Danyluk, 2025](#); [Handayani et al., 2021](#); [Maemunah, 2023](#)). Parenting applied to children today should be gentle and non-authoritarian. When children feel comfortable while being advised and being close to their parents,

the communication process will run smoothly. When children are advised, they tend to listen and obey. This is different when the relationship between children and parents still needs improvement. Children will often rebel and dare to resist. Therefore, parents have the most important role in shaping a child's character.

When children are given the opportunity to use gadgets, parents should have a good understanding of their use. Mothers, as companions to children, become figures who can communicate well in considering activities that children like, even if these are related to social media (Faiz et al., 2022; Lou & Xu, 2022). When children like social media, there is nothing wrong with parents also using social media, provided that the social media used has a positive influence. Provide education when children use social media and always accompany them when they are engaging with social media. As educators during the golden age of children, they should be introduced to the use of the digital world while continuing to supervise it wisely and in a directed manner. The use of digital technology can provide variety and innovation in learning, and the role of teachers and parents is very important in preparing media optimally so that the learning process can run smoothly. The conditions of the training activities in the Counselling Activity are visualised in Figure 2.



Figure 2. Counselling Activity

Implications

The findings of this community service activity imply that digital era counseling is a highly relevant and effective approach for strengthening parental competence in managing children's gawai use during early childhood. The significant improvement in parents' understanding indicates that structured guidance can reduce uncertainty and anxiety while promoting informed, reflective, and responsible digital parenting practices. These implications highlight the importance of positioning parents as key agents in shaping children's digital habits, ensuring that technology functions as a supportive educational tool rather than a source of behavioral and social risk.

Contribution of Community Service

This community service initiative contributes meaningfully to early childhood education by empowering parents with practical knowledge and strategies for supervising gawai use in the home environment. Through interactive counseling, the program fostered awareness of balanced screen time, content selection, and the importance of maintaining direct social interaction between parents and children. Furthermore, the activity strengthened collaboration between families and schools,

reinforcing the shared responsibility of nurturing children's cognitive, social, and moral development in the digital era.

Limitations

Despite its positive outcomes, this activity has several limitations. The number of participating parents was relatively limited and drawn from a single school context, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the evaluation relied on short-term pretest–posttest measurements, limiting insights into long-term behavioral changes in parenting practices and children's digital habits. Observational data were also not systematically collected, which may have provided deeper insight into actual changes in parent–child interactions following the counseling.

Suggestions

Based on these limitations, future community service programs are recommended to involve a broader range of participants across different educational and socio-economic backgrounds. Longitudinal follow-up activities should be incorporated to examine the sustainability of parental behavior changes and their impact on children's development. It is also suggested that future counseling integrate practical workshops, digital literacy modules, and collaborative parent–teacher forums. By expanding scope and continuity, digital era counseling can evolve into a sustainable model for fostering healthy, ethical, and developmentally appropriate technology use among young children.

CONCLUSION

The counselling programme themed “Educating Children in the Digital Era” carried out at SD Negeri 1 Linggasari has been proven to have a significant impact on parents of students. This activity not only increased their knowledge, but also raised awareness of the importance of balanced parenting in dealing with technological advancement. Many parents previously felt worried and did not have sufficient preparation to supervise their children's use of gadgets. Through the material provided, participants gained insight into how to build warm communication with children, instil values of politeness, and set clear boundaries on the use of technology so that it does not have a negative impact. This programme emphasised that children need to be involved in discussions with their parents without excessive pressure, so that they feel valued and are willing to be open. When children feel comfortable, the process of habituation and education will run more effectively, enabling them to independently select which digital content is beneficial and which should be avoided. In addition, this counselling activity also succeeded in encouraging the creation of synergy between parents and schools or early childhood education institutions. This partnership is very necessary so that children's growth and development can run more optimally, where parents as the first educators continue to hold an important role, while educational institutions function as supportive partners that complement each other. By sharing information and experiences, both parents and educators can work together to create a positive learning environment, not only at home but also at school. This also helps children to avoid screen addiction and to still have time for physical play, socialising with peers, and interacting with family members. Education of this kind is highly relevant in the digital era, because technology can be likened to a double edged sword that can become a learning tool when used wisely, but also has the potential to cause problems if misused. Through this counselling programme, it is hoped that future generations of children will become individuals who are technologically competent, critical, creative, and who continue to uphold the noble social and cultural values of the nation.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

NE conceptualized and designed the community service program, led the digital era counseling activities, and drafted the original manuscript. DA contributed to the preparation of counseling materials, facilitated interactive discussions with parents, and supported data collection during the program implementation. IU conducted data analysis, interpreted the pretest–posttest findings, and critically revised the manuscript to enhance academic coherence and clarity. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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