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Original Article

Digital Parenting Mediation for Children with Mild Intellectual Disability: Predictors of Restrictive and Active Strategies

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Abstract. Children with mild intellectual disability are particularly vulnerable to online exploitation, cyberbullying, and excessive screen exposure due to limitations in critical reasoning and social comprehension. This descriptive correlational study explored parental mediation patterns among families whose children regularly use digital devices. A culturally adapted 25 item questionnaire (20 mediation items + 4 parental self efficacy items) was used. This research was analyzed using ANOVA. The findings indicate significant differences in parental mediation, with restrictive strategies more pronounced among families with longer gadget use and active mediation more prevalent among parents with higher education and greater self-efficacy. Overall, parental belief in their ability to manage technology, combined with educational factors and children's device-use habits, shaped the form and intensity of mediation. The findings underscore the need for digital parenting interventions that reinforce parental confidence and encourage a more balanced shift from restrictive control toward supportive, communicative, and proactive mediation strategies.

Keywords: Parenting Mediation, Mild Intellectual Disabilities, Digital Risks, Restrictive Mediation, Active Mediation

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Introduction

The proliferation of smartphones and tablet has dramatically reshaped childhood in Indonesia. Recent data indicate that 79% of Indonesia children aged 8-12 own or regularly used a smartphone (Poerwanti et al., 2024), with similiar trends observed among children with special needs in urban areas (Suwahyo et al., 2022). For children with mild intellectual disability (IQ 50-70), this digital immersion present a double-edged sword: potential for educational enrichment versus heightened vulnerability to harm (Caton & Chapman, 2017).

Internasional evidence consistently shows that individuals with intellectual disability experience online victimization rates two to four times higher than neurotypical peers (Martínez-Arnau et al., 2023). Specific risks include sexual grooming, financial exploitation, cyberbullying, and excessive screen time leading to sleep distruption and behavioral regression (Jenaro et al., 2018). These risks are exacerbated by core characteristics of children with mild intellectual disability: difficulty recognizing sarcasm or deceptive intent, impulsivity, limited verbal reasoning, and heavy reliance on imitative and observational learning (Abdelwahab et al., 2025).

In Indonesia, the situation is compounded by several contextual factors. First, many special schools shifted to blended or fully online learning during and post-COVID-19, forcing parents

into sudden digital-gatekeeper roles without prior training. Second, parental digital literacy remains low in middle-to low-income families-the majority demographic of children enrolled in public special school (SLB). Third, cultural norms of authoritarian parenting may favor rule imposition over open discussion, potentially skewing mediation toward restrictive strategies.

Parental mediation theory (Lafton et al., 2024) offers a robust framework for understanding how parents manage children's media environments. It distinguishes three primary strategies, though only two are consistently measured in disabilitu research: research mediation that is setting rules, time limits, technical controls, and moniroting history; and active (or evaluative) mediation that is discussing content, co-using devices, explaining risks, and modeling safe behavior (Livingstone & Byrne, 2018). A third strategy, co-use without discussion, is less relevant for the children with mild intellectual disability (Nichols & Selim, 2022).

A critical predictor of strategy choice is parental self-efficacy in digital mediation the belief that one can effectively guide a child's online behavior (Livingstone & Byrne, 2018). High self-efficacy parents are significantly more likely to employ active mediation, which is developmentally more appropriate for children who learn primarily through modeling and explicit instruction (Cibrian et al., 2021). Most existing local research in Indonesia focuses on typically developing early childhood (Sari et al., 2024) or qualitative accounts of parenting stress (Adorjan et al., 2022). This study therefore aims to provide quantitatve baseline orf parental mediation levels in this population, compare restrictive versus active mediation practices, and identify demographic and psychological predictors of mediation strategy choice.

Method

This study employed a descriptive–correlational quantitative design, which allows researchers to systematically examine the relationship between variables without manipulating them, and utilized a convenience sampling technique to recruit participants based on accessibility and availability (Mahmud, 2016).

Participants

The participants were 24 parents (18 mothers and 6 fathers) od children aged 8-15 years (mean = 11,8 years) who had been formally diagnosed with mild intellectual disability and were enrolled in a public special school in North Sumatera, Indonesia. Data were collected in October 2025. inclusion criteria required that the child used a smartphone or tablet at least three times per week and that responding parents was the primary person supervising the child's digital media use. Convenience sampling was selected because the target population is small, geographically concentratedm and difficult to access through probability methods, making it an appropriate and widely accepted approarch for exploratory research in special-education settings (Etikan, 2016).

Instruments

The research instrument was a 25-item self-report questionnaire comprising three sections. The first section consisted of the 20 item parental mediation scale, with 10 items measuring restrictive mediation, such as discussing inappropriate content, co-viewing, and modeling safe online behavior. All 25 items used a 5-point Likert response format ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very often). Additional demographic questions captured child daily gadget-use duration (in hous), parental education level (caregorized as junior or lower, senior high school, or diploma/bachelor), parent and child afe, and parent gender. Total mediation scores ranged from 20 to 100, with higher scores indicating more frequent mediation practices. The higher the validity, the more accurately the instrument describes the phenomenon being measured

(Syahputra et al., 2025). The questionnaire was administered online via Google Form to ensure accessibility and to minimize physical contact. Informed consent was obtained electronically from all participant, and the form inluced voice-assisted instructions and large-font options for parents with lower literacy levels. Completion time averaged 12-15 minutes, and the researcher provided real-time WhatsApp support for clarification.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed with descriptive statostocs were calculated for all variables. Pared-samples T-test were used to compare restrictive and actove mediation scores. One-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) with Tukey post-hoc tests examined differences in mediation strategies across child gadget-use duration groups and parental education levels (Creswell, 2018). Independent-samples t-test assessed gender differences. Pearson product-moment correlations explored relationship between continuous variable (self-efficacy, parent age, childe age, and mediation score). Finally, multiple linear regression was performed to determine the unique contrbution of chld gadget-use duration, parental education, parental self-efficacy, and parent gender to the total parental mediaton score. All assumptios for parametric tests (normality, homogeneity of variance, linearity) were checked and met effect sizes were reported to aid interpretation of practicall significance.

Result and Discussion

The study revealed a high level of overall parental mediation among the 24 parents, with a mean total score of 72,63 (SD = 9,81, range 56-94), placing the majority in the high category according to guidelines (45,8% high; 16,7% very high; 37,5 % moderate, 0% low/very low). Restristive mediation was notbaly stronger (mean per item = 4,31) compared to active mediation (mean per item = 3,12), with a paired-samples t-test comfirming a significant difference. Parental self-efficacy averaged 18,75 out of 25 (mean per item = 3,75), reflecting moderate confidence in digital mediation skills.

Table 1. ANOVA Result for Parental Mediation by Child Gadget Use and Parental Education

Variabel	Group	n	Restrictive Mediation (M±SD)	Active Mediation (M±SD)	F (p- value) Restrictibe Mediation	F (p-value) Active Mediation
Child Daily Gadget Use	≤1 hour	6	37,83±5,31	30.17 ± 6.94	8.91 (.001)	1.12 (.346)
	1–3 hours	10	42.10 ± 4.72	31.50 ± 7.09		
	>3 hours	8	48.25 ± 3.45	31.75 ± 7.89		
Parental Education	Junior high	7	41.57 ± 6.13	27.14 ± 6.41	1.94 (.169)	7.68 (.003)
	Senior high	10	42.90 ± 5.99	30.90 ± 6.85		
	Diploma/bachelor	7	44.86 ± 5.31	36.29 ± 6.60		

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) explored differences by child's daily gadget use (≤ 1 hour, n =6; 1-3 hours, n=10; >3 hours, n=8). restrictive mediation varied significantly has a large effect, with Tukey post-hoc test showing that parents of children using gadget >3 hours per day applied stronger restrictions than both the 1-3 hous and ≤ 1 hour groups. Active mediation showed no significant variation across usage groups. When examining parental education level (junior high school or lower), ANOVA revealed significant differences in active mediation, with Diploma/Bachelor parents scroring higher than senior high school and junior high school parents. Restrictive mediation showed no education-rekated differences.

Gender analysis indicated that mothers (n=18) employed significantly more active mediation than fathers (n=6), with means of 3,28 versus 2,65 per item. Correlation analyses

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showed a strong positive relationship between parental self-efficacy and active mediation (r=0,68, p<0,001) and total mediation (r=0,71, p<0,001), while parent age correlated negatively with total mediation (r=-0,44, p=0,031). Child age showed no significant correlation (r=0,22, p=0,292). Multiple linear regression examined predictrs of total mediation score, with child daily gadget use, parental education, parental self-efficacy, and parent gender entered simultaneously. The model was highly significant. Parental sefl-efficacy was the stronngest predictor, followrd by child gadget usea dn parental education. Gender was not significant.

Discussion

The predominance of restrictive over active mediation aligns with global patterns among parents of children with intellectual disability (Caton & Chapman, 2017) and reflects several contextual factprs in Indonesia. First, lower parental digital literacy, particularly among middle- to low-income families, likely limits confidence in engaging children in explanatory discussions about online risks. Second, cultural norms favoring authoritarian parenting emphazise rules and compliance ober dialogue, as evidenced by the lack of education-related differences in restrective practives. Thrid, the significant increase in restrictive mediation with longer child gadget use suggests reactive parenting triggered by perceived risk rather than proactive skill building.

Parents who frequently access the internet tend to adopt active mediation approaches, whereas those with limited online engagement are more inclined toward restrictive control (Kirwil et al., 2009). Research also indicates that older parents demonstrate higher levels of control than younger ones (Brito et al., 2017), and parents with lower education and income levels commonly favor restrictive methods (Livingstone et al., 2015). In addition, parents from conservative continental European regions are more likely to use technical solutions than engage in active mediation practices (Kalmus & Roosalu, 2011).

While extensive research has examined parental and environmental factors that influence parental digital mediation, limited attention has been given to child-related characteristics that may shape mediation strategies. Previous findings suggest that parental mediation decreases as children mature (Nagy et al., 2023) and that girls are more often guided through active mediation, whereas boys are supervised using restrictive approaches (Talves & Kalmus, 2015). However, the extent to which children's digital behavior and well-being directly influence parental mediation decisions remains unclear.

Drawing on Palfrey & Gasser (2011), this study conceptualizes children's general screen exposure and social media engagement as key indicators of digital behavior. Although much research focuses on how parental mediation reduces undesirable screen time (Griffiths et al., 2016), we propose that the duration of children’s digital engagement may itself influence mediation strategy selection (Sciacca et al., 2022). During adolescence, parental control over digital use typically decreases as teens begin to regulate their own online time (Sciacca et al., 2022; Sobkin & Fedotova, 2021), yet parental involvement persists. Parents may adjust their mediation strategies when perceiving excessive screen use (Kanashov & Trusova, 2021). Therefore, the second objective of this research is to examine whether children’s screen time and social network usage predict parental mediation practices. The consistenly low active mediation is particularly problematic for children with mild intellectual disability, who rely heavily on modeling and explicit instruction to internalize safety rules (Lundmark, 2025). Restriction-only approarches may reduce immediate exposure to harm but fail to equip children for unsupervised digital environment-an inevitable reality as they transition to edolescene. The strong correlation between parental self-efficacy and active mediation underscores the pivotal role of confidence (Nikken & Schols, 2015). The regression results further confirm self-efficacy as the strongest predictor, suggesting that interventions mush prioritize building parental confidence before introducting specific mediation techniques.

The findings of this study underscore several important implications for practice, policy, and future research in the domain of parental digital mediation. The strong predictive value of parental self-efficacy highlights the need for capacity-building initiatives that not only provide technical knowledge but also enhance parents' confidence in facilitating dialogue-based mediation rather than relying solely on restrictive measures. Given that restrictions increase sharply in response to prolonged gadget use, schools and community programs should implement preventative digital literacy education rather than reactive strategies that emerge only after risks become visible. Furthermore, the lack of substantial differences in restrictive mediation across educational backgrounds suggests that cultural factors may play a more influential role than previously recognized, highlighting the importance of culturally responsive parenting interventions in Indonesia. Programs designed for parents of children with mild intellectual disabilities should prioritize explicit communication strategies and guided skill-building to prepare children for independent online engagement. Finally, these findings encourage future research to further explore child-specific characteristics and socio-cultural determinants that shape parental mediation patterns to develop more targeted and contextually relevant intervention models.

Conclusions

This study provides the quantitative baseline of parental digital mediation practices among Sumatera Utara, Indonesian parents of children with mild intellectual disability. The high overall mediation score, driven predominantly by restrictive strategies, reflect strong parental awareness but critical gap in active mediation-particularly among lower-educated parents, fathers, and those with lower self-efficacy. This imbalance is concerning given the developmental needs of children with mild intellectual disability, who require explicit modeling and discussion to build long-term digital safety skills. The regression model, explaining 71% of variance in mediation practices, positions parental self-efficacy as the most actionable intervention target. Programs that enhance confidence through guided practice, peer observation, and positive reinforcement can shift parents toward balance mediation. The education and gender disparities futher suggest that interventions must be accessible to lower-literacy grups and engage fathers more actively. We propose a three-tier national strategy : 1) low-literacy digital modules delivered via accessible platforms, 2) school-based workshops integrating self-efficacy and active mediation training, and 3) policy-level integration of digital parenting into existing family welfare programs. These efforts will transform digital media from a primary risk factor into a tool for fostering independence and social inclusion for Indonesian children with mild intellectual disability.

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