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DIGITAL CHARACTER PARENTING: A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR STRENGTHENING EARLY CHILDHOOD CHARACTER IN THE DIGITAL ERA

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Abstrak

Perkembangan teknologi digital telah membawa perubahan yang signifikan terhadap pola pengasuhan dan proses pembentukan karakter anak usia dini. Kehadiran berbagai perangkat digital dan akses informasi yang semakin luas memberikan peluang bagi perkembangan anak, namun juga menghadirkan tantangan dalam penanaman nilai-nilai karakter. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji dan merumuskan konsep Digital Character Parenting sebagai model penguatan karakter anak usia dini di era digital. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan library research dengan menganalisis berbagai literatur ilmiah yang berkaitan dengan pendidikan karakter, parenting digital, literasi digital keluarga, dan perkembangan anak usia dini. Data diperoleh dari buku, artikel jurnal, serta berbagai sumber akademik yang relevan dan dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis isi (*content analysis*). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penguatan karakter anak usia dini pada era digital memerlukan pendekatan pengasuhan yang mengintegrasikan pendidikan karakter dengan literasi digital. Berdasarkan hasil sintesis literatur, model Digital Character Parenting terdiri atas lima komponen utama, yaitu *Digital Role Modeling*, *Digital Supervision*, *Family Digital Literacy*, *Character Habituation*, dan *Parent–School Partnership*. Kelima komponen tersebut saling berkaitan dalam mendukung pembentukan karakter anak sekaligus membimbing mereka dalam menggunakan teknologi digital secara bijaksana, bertanggung jawab, dan beretika. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa Digital Character Parenting dapat menjadi model konseptual yang relevan untuk menjawab tantangan pengasuhan dan pendidikan karakter anak usia dini di era digital serta dapat dijadikan sebagai acuan bagi orang tua, pendidik, dan pengambil kebijakan dalam mengembangkan strategi penguatan karakter yang adaptif terhadap perkembangan teknologi.

Kata Kunci: Digital Character Parenting; Pendidikan Karakter; Anak Usia Dini; Parenting Digital

Abstract

The rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed parenting practices and the process of character development among young children. The widespread availability of digital devices and increasing access to information provide opportunities for children's growth and learning while simultaneously presenting challenges in the cultivation of character values. This study aims to examine and formulate the concept of Digital Character Parenting as a model for strengthening early childhood character in the digital era. The study employed a library research approach by analyzing various scholarly works related to character education, digital parenting, family digital literacy, and early childhood development. Data were collected from books, journal articles, and other relevant academic sources and analyzed using content analysis techniques. The findings indicate that strengthening early childhood character in the digital age requires a parenting approach that integrates character education with digital literacy. Based on the synthesis of the literature, the Digital Character Parenting model consists of five key components: Digital Role Modeling, Digital Supervision, Family Digital Literacy, Character Habituation, and Parent–School Partnership. These components are interconnected in supporting children's character formation while guiding them to use digital technology wisely,

responsibly, and ethically. This study concludes that Digital Character Parenting can serve as a relevant conceptual model for addressing the challenges of parenting and character education in the digital era. Furthermore, the model may serve as a reference for parents, educators, and policymakers in developing character-strengthening strategies that are adaptive to technological advancement.
***Keywords**: Digital Character Parenting; Character Education; Early Childhood; Digital Parenting*

Introduction

The development of digital technology has become one of the most influential phenomena in 21st-century society. The digital revolution, marked by advancements in the Internet, Artificial Intelligence (AI), social media, cloud computing, and various smart devices, has transformed nearly every aspect of human life (Deckker & Sumanasekara, 2025). Technology is no longer merely a communication tool; rather, it has become an integral part of daily activities, including education (- et al., 2024). This transformation has created numerous opportunities to enhance access to information, expand learning resources, and establish more interactive learning environments. At the same time, digital transformation has introduced new challenges that require individuals and society to utilize technology wisely and responsibly (Mexhuani, 2025).

The rapid advancement of digital technology has not only affected adults but has also significantly influenced the lives of young children. Children born in the digital era grow up in environments surrounded by technological devices such as smartphones, tablets, computers, digital televisions, and increasingly accessible internet connectivity (Amalina, 2023). This condition has positioned early childhood as a generation with experiences distinct from those of previous generations. They interact with technology from a very young age, making digital media an integral part of their play, learning, and communication activities. This phenomenon indicates that digital technology has become inseparable from children's growth and developmental processes (Green et al., 2024).

In the context of early childhood education, digital technology offers numerous benefits that can support learning processes. Educational applications, interactive learning videos, educational games, and digital learning platforms can assist children in developing cognitive, language, motor, creative, and problem-solving skills (Putri et al., 2025). The appropriate use of technology can also enhance children's learning motivation by presenting educational content in engaging ways that align with their developmental characteristics. Therefore, digital technology possesses significant potential to optimize early childhood development when utilized purposefully and in accordance with children's developmental needs (Rohmah & Aflahani, 2019).

Nevertheless, the advancement of digital technology has also generated various consequences that require serious attention. Excessive use of digital devices may lead to reduced physical activity, decreased quality of social

interaction, and increased dependency on digital technologies. Furthermore, children are at risk of exposure to age-inappropriate content through social media, online games, and other digital platforms. Uncontrolled exposure to technology may affect children's behavioral, emotional, and cognitive development. This condition suggests that the use of digital technology influences not only academic aspects but also the formation of children's character (Asubki et al., 2025).

Character serves as a fundamental foundation for individual personality development. During early childhood, character formation becomes one of the primary goals of education because this period represents a crucial phase in children's moral and social development. Values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, cooperation, empathy, tolerance, and religiosity should be instilled from an early age so that they become embedded in children's daily habits (Khoiriyah & Elhady, 2025). Consistent character formation during early childhood can have long-term impacts on children's behavior throughout adolescence and adulthood. Therefore, character education should be a central concern in every educational and parenting process (Retnaningrum & Hazhari, 2024).

The importance of character education has become increasingly evident amid the rapid growth of digital technology. The vast flow of information enables children to acquire various values and influences from digital environments that may not always align with the values taught by families and schools. Children can easily imitate behaviors observed through digital media without possessing adequate abilities to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate conduct according to social norms (Mainita et al., 2025). This situation necessitates more systematic efforts to strengthen children's character so that they can utilize technology in healthy and responsible ways.

In the process of character development among young children, the family plays a critical role. The family serves as the first and primary educational environment where children gain initial experiences in understanding values, norms, and social behavior. Parents act as the primary role models whom children emulate in various aspects of life. Through daily interactions, children learn attitudes, habits, and values practiced within the family environment. Consequently, the quality of parenting provided by parents significantly determines the success of character formation during early childhood (Rifai & Nur Aisyah Zulkifli, 2026).

However, the role of parents in the digital era is accompanied by considerable challenges. Many parents lack sufficient digital literacy skills to effectively guide their children in using technology wisely. Some parents even rely on digital devices as the primary means of entertaining their children without fully considering the potential long-term consequences. Additionally, occupational demands often reduce the intensity of parent-child interactions, resulting in less effective supervision of children's

technology use (Revandi et al., 2025). Such conditions may hinder character development, which ideally occurs through consistent guidance and exemplary behavior.

In addition to families, early childhood education institutions also bear responsibility for strengthening children's character. Teachers serve not only as facilitators of learning but also as role models who help children understand moral and social values. However, character education initiatives within schools frequently encounter obstacles when they are not supported by the family environment. Inconsistencies between the values taught at school and those practiced at home may reduce the effectiveness of character internalization among children. Therefore, strong synergy between families and educational institutions is essential in supporting children's character development (Lutfi Firdausi, 2025).

Previous studies have demonstrated that character education, digital parenting, and digital literacy are significant factors influencing early childhood development. Research on character education generally focuses on instructional strategies implemented in schools, whereas studies on digital parenting primarily emphasize parental supervision of children's technology use. Meanwhile, investigations into digital technology in early childhood tend to highlight both the positive and negative impacts of digital device usage on children's development. Although these studies have made valuable contributions, they still tend to examine these variables separately (Asmayawati, 2023).

A review of previous studies reveals limitations in integrating character education, family parenting practices, and digital technology utilization into a comprehensive model. Most existing studies have not specifically proposed a conceptual framework that parents can use as guidance for strengthening children's character amid rapid technological development. In other words, a research gap remains regarding the development of parenting models capable of linking character education with digital mentoring practices within family life.

To address this gap, the present study proposes the concept of Digital Character Parenting as a model for strengthening early childhood character in the digital era. This concept emphasizes the integration of character education, digital literacy, parental role modeling, technology-use supervision, positive behavioral habituation, and collaboration between families and educational institutions. Through this approach, digital technology is viewed not merely as a source of risk but also as a medium that can be utilized to foster positive and adaptive character development in young children. This concept is expected to provide a new perspective for developing parenting practices that are relevant to contemporary societal demands.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to examine in depth the concept of Digital Character Parenting as a character-strengthening

model that is aligned with the needs of early childhood in the digital age. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to the field of early childhood education while also providing practical recommendations for parents, teachers, and policymakers in designing effective character-strengthening strategies. Ultimately, future generations are expected not only to possess the ability to utilize technology optimally but also to develop strong character, ethical values, and social responsibility in their lives as members of society.

Methods

This study employed a library research approach using a conceptual study design to formulate the Digital Character Parenting model as a framework for strengthening early childhood character in the digital era. A library research approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to explore, analyze, and synthesize existing theories, concepts, and empirical findings related to character education, digital parenting, family digital literacy, and early childhood development (Anantama, 2024). Through this approach, the study sought to develop a comprehensive conceptual model capable of addressing the challenges of character formation in contemporary digital environments.

The data used in this study consisted of secondary data obtained from various academic sources, including books, peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, research reports, and other scholarly publications relevant to the research topic. The selected literature focused on four major areas, namely character education, digital parenting, family digital literacy, and early childhood education. To ensure relevance and scientific rigor, priority was given to publications that provided theoretical foundations, conceptual discussions, and empirical evidence related to parenting practices and character development in the digital age (Suargani et al., 2023).

Data collection was conducted through a systematic documentation process. Relevant literature was identified, selected, and organized based on its contribution to the research objectives. The selection process involved reviewing the relevance of each source to the study focus, examining its theoretical and empirical contributions, and classifying the literature according to major themes **(Şahin & Yan, 2013)**. Subsequently, the collected sources were categorized into several thematic areas to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the relationships among character education, parenting practices, and digital technology utilization.

The study employed content analysis as the primary technique for data analysis. This technique was used to identify key concepts, compare theoretical perspectives, examine findings from previous studies, and synthesize recurring themes across the literature. The analysis process involved several stages, including data reduction, categorization, interpretation, and synthesis. Through these stages, the study identified essential dimensions and patterns related to character strengthening and digital parenting

practices, which served as the foundation for developing the proposed conceptual framework (Wardana et al., 2026).

The final stage of the study involved constructing the Digital Character Parenting model based on the synthesis of theories and research findings. The analysis resulted in the identification of five interconnected components, namely Digital Role Modeling, Digital Supervision, Family Digital Literacy, Character Habituation, and Parent–School Partnership. These components were integrated into a comprehensive framework designed to support character development among young children while promoting responsible and ethical engagement with digital technology. The proposed model is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the fields of early childhood education, character education, and digital parenting.

Results and Discussion

The review of various studies on character education, digital parenting, family digital literacy, and early childhood development indicates that the rapid advancement of digital technology has brought about fundamental changes in child-rearing practices. The presence of digital technology has not only transformed the ways children access information and interact with their surroundings but has also influenced the process of character formation, which has traditionally been shaped through direct interactions within families and communities. Numerous studies have demonstrated that inadequately supervised use of digital technology may contribute to a range of developmental challenges, including reduced social interaction skills, poor self-regulation, increased consumerist behavior, and weakened internalization of moral values among young children. Conversely, when appropriately guided, digital technology can serve as an effective medium for fostering positive character development in children.

Based on the literature analysis, it was found that most studies on early childhood character education primarily focus on the implementation of character values within school settings, whereas research on digital parenting tends to emphasize parental supervision of children's technology use. Meanwhile, studies on family digital literacy generally focus on enhancing the ability of parents and children to utilize technology safely and productively. These findings suggest that the three areas are still predominantly examined separately, resulting in the absence of a comprehensive model that effectively integrates character education, family parenting practices, and digital technology utilization.

The findings of this study indicate that strengthening early childhood character in the digital era requires a more adaptive approach to technological development. Character education can no longer rely solely on conventional methods but must also take into account the digital environment as a new social space that significantly influences children's development. In this context, the family occupies a strategic position as the first environment that introduces technology to children while simultaneously serving as the

primary setting for character formation. Therefore, character strengthening in the digital era necessitates a parenting model capable of integrating character values with healthy and responsible technology-use practices.

Drawing upon the synthesis of relevant theories and previous research findings, this study proposes the concept of Digital Character Parenting as a model for strengthening early childhood character in the digital era. Digital Character Parenting is defined as a parenting approach that integrates character education, digital literacy, technology-use guidance, and collaboration between families and educational institutions to support children's character development. This model is developed based on the premise that digital technology has become an inseparable part of modern children's lives, thereby requiring character-strengthening strategies to adapt to this reality.

The findings further reveal that the Digital Character Parenting model consists of five interrelated components that collectively form a comprehensive parenting framework. The first component is Digital Role Modeling, which refers to parents serving as positive, ethical, and responsible role models in their use of digital technology. The literature indicates that young children possess a strong tendency to imitate parental behavior. Consequently, parents' digital practices become one of the primary sources through which children learn how to engage with technology appropriately and responsibly.

The second component is Digital Supervision, which encompasses the process of guiding and monitoring children's use of digital technology. The findings suggest that effective supervision extends beyond merely limiting screen time; it also involves selecting age-appropriate content, providing guidance on responsible technology use, and actively participating in children's digital activities. Consistent parental supervision enables children to experience a safer digital environment while simultaneously supporting the development of positive character traits.

The third component is Family Digital Literacy, which refers to the family's capacity to understand, evaluate, and utilize digital technology wisely. The analysis demonstrates that family digital literacy plays a crucial role in determining the quality of children's interactions with technology. Parents with higher levels of digital literacy are generally more capable of identifying both the benefits and potential risks associated with technology use, thereby enabling them to provide more effective guidance to their children. Therefore, digital literacy serves as a fundamental pillar in the implementation of Digital Character Parenting.

The fourth component is Character Habituation, which emphasizes the consistent cultivation of character values in daily life. The findings indicate that character is not developed solely through instruction but rather through continuous habituation and repeated practice. Within this model, values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, empathy, cooperation, and religiosity are nurtured through various family activities, both

in direct interactions and through the use of digital media. Such habituation enables children to internalize character values more deeply and sustainably.

The fifth component is Parent–School Partnership, which refers to the collaboration between families and educational institutions in supporting children's character development. The findings suggest that character education is more effective when there is consistency between the values taught at school and those practiced at home. Consequently, intensive communication between parents and teachers becomes a crucial factor in ensuring the successful implementation of Digital Character Parenting. This collaboration may be realized through parenting programs, digital literacy training, and various educational activities that actively involve both families and schools.

Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that Digital Character Parenting represents a character-strengthening model that is highly relevant to the needs of young children in the digital era. This model offers an approach that does not regard technology as a threat to child development but rather as a tool that can be utilized to support character formation when used appropriately. The integration of character education, digital literacy, parental role modeling, technology supervision, and family–school collaboration constitutes the primary strength of this model in addressing the parenting challenges emerging from rapid technological advancement. Therefore, Digital Character Parenting can serve as a conceptual framework that contributes to the development of parenting and early childhood education practices that are more responsive and adaptive to contemporary societal demands.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the rapid advancement of digital technology has significantly transformed the context of early childhood character development (Nugraheni, 2018). Digital technology has become an inseparable component of children's daily lives, influencing not only their cognitive and social development but also the formation of their values, attitudes, and behaviors. This finding supports the view that child development occurs within multiple environmental systems, including the digital environment, which has increasingly become a prominent context for socialization (Adeyemi, 2025). Consequently, character education in the digital era requires approaches that acknowledge the influence of digital technology while ensuring that children develop the moral and social competencies necessary for responsible participation in contemporary society.

The study further reveals that traditional approaches to character education are no longer sufficient to address the challenges posed by digital transformation. While schools continue to play a vital role in transmitting moral values, the pervasive presence of digital media has expanded children's learning environments beyond formal educational settings (Pramesti et al., 2025). Children are continuously exposed to information, values, and behavioral models through digital platforms, many of which may not align with the values promoted by families and schools. Therefore, character

development strategies must evolve to address the realities of children's digital experiences. This finding reinforces the argument that character education should not be confined to classroom instruction but should also encompass guidance within digital environments (Nurdiana & Mustamin, 2025).

A significant finding of this study is the strategic role of families in strengthening children's character in the digital era. Families remain the primary social institution responsible for introducing values, norms, and behavioral expectations to children. The findings indicate that parental involvement is essential in helping children navigate digital environments responsibly. This perspective is consistent with social learning theory, which emphasizes that children learn behaviors, attitudes, and values through observation and imitation of significant role models. Since parents constitute children's closest and most influential role models, their attitudes toward technology use substantially affect how children perceive and utilize digital media (Khaeriyah Khaeriyah & Nurasia Natsir, 2025).

The concept of Digital Character Parenting proposed in this study provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding parental responsibilities in the digital era. Unlike conventional parenting approaches that primarily focus on controlling children's behavior, Digital Character Parenting emphasizes the integration of character education and digital literacy within everyday parenting practices. This approach recognizes that restricting children's access to technology is neither realistic nor beneficial in contemporary society. Instead, children should be guided to use technology in ways that promote positive values, responsible behavior, and ethical decision-making. As such, Digital Character Parenting represents a shift from a protective approach toward an empowering approach to parenting.

The first component of the proposed model, Digital Role Modeling, highlights the importance of parental example in shaping children's digital behavior. The findings suggest that children observe and imitate how parents interact with technology, making parental behavior a critical factor in the development of children's digital habits. Parents who demonstrate responsible technology use, maintain healthy screen-time habits, and engage respectfully in online interactions provide practical examples of digital citizenship for their children (Ningtya Ayu et al., 2025). Therefore, effective character education in the digital era begins with the ability of parents to model the values and behaviors they expect their children to adopt.

The second component, Digital Supervision, emphasizes the necessity of active parental involvement in children's digital experiences. The findings indicate that effective supervision involves more than monitoring screen time; it requires meaningful engagement with children's online activities and experiences. Such supervision allows parents to identify potential risks, provide guidance, and help children develop critical thinking skills regarding digital content. Through active supervision, parents can

transform digital experiences into opportunities for learning and character development rather than sources of potential harm (Sulastya Ningish et al., 2026).

Family Digital Literacy emerged as another critical component of the model. The findings demonstrate that parents' ability to understand and utilize digital technologies significantly influences the quality of guidance they provide to their children. Parents with higher levels of digital literacy are better equipped to recognize online risks, evaluate digital content, and support children's responsible technology use (Maulana Ahmad et al., 2024). This finding suggests that strengthening parental digital literacy should be considered a key strategy in promoting healthy child development in the digital age. Without adequate digital literacy, parents may struggle to fulfill their educational and supervisory roles effectively (Burhan Nudin et al., 2024).

The findings also underscore the importance of Character Habituation in fostering sustainable character development. Character values such as honesty, responsibility, empathy, discipline, and respect are not developed through isolated instructional activities but through consistent practice and reinforcement in everyday life. The Digital Character Parenting model emphasizes the integration of these values into both offline and online experiences. This approach reflects the understanding that character formation is a continuous process requiring repeated opportunities for children to practice and internalize positive behaviors in diverse contexts (Rahmawaty & Supriyadi, 2025).

Another important aspect of the proposed model is the Parent–School Partnership. The findings suggest that character education is most effective when families and educational institutions share common goals and collaborate closely. Consistency between home and school environments enhances children's ability to internalize character values and apply them in different situations. In the context of digital technology, collaboration between parents and teachers becomes increasingly important because children encounter digital experiences across multiple settings (Syifa Salsabila Mahmuddah & Junaidi, 2025). Joint efforts in digital literacy education, character-building programs, and parental engagement initiatives can strengthen the effectiveness of character development interventions.

Overall, the discussion highlights that Digital Character Parenting provides a comprehensive and contextually relevant framework for strengthening early childhood character in the digital era. The model acknowledges the realities of technological advancement while emphasizing the continued importance of parental guidance, character education, and collaborative support systems. By integrating digital literacy with character formation, Digital Character Parenting offers a balanced approach that enables children to benefit from technological opportunities while developing the ethical values and social competencies necessary for responsible citizenship. Therefore, the model has the potential to contribute significantly to contemporary parenting practices

and the broader field of early childhood education.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the rapid development of digital technology has significantly influenced early childhood character formation, presenting both opportunities and challenges for parents and educators. While technology can support children's learning and development, its improper use may negatively affect moral values, social behavior, and character growth. Therefore, character education in the digital era requires approaches that integrate technological awareness with fundamental character values.

The study proposes Digital Character Parenting as a conceptual model for strengthening children's character through five key components: Digital Role Modeling, Digital Supervision, Family Digital Literacy, Character Habituation, and Parent–School Partnership. These components work together to guide children in using digital technology responsibly while fostering positive character development.

This model contributes theoretically to the fields of early childhood education, character education, and digital parenting, while also providing practical guidance for parents, educators, and policymakers. Ultimately, Digital Character Parenting is expected to help develop children who are digitally literate, ethically responsible, and equipped to face the challenges of the digital age.

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