



Narrative Exploration of Parents' Role as Family Digital Protectors in the Development of Digital Literacy in MI Social Studies Learning

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ABSTRACT

The increasing use of digital technology among elementary school students highlights the importance of parental support in developing digital literacy. This study examines the role of parents as digital protectors in supporting Social Studies learning at MIN 6 Demak, Indonesia. A descriptive phenomenological approach was conducted with two teachers, three parents, and three students through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological method. The findings identify three parental mediation strategies: preventive mediation (time and content control), educational mediation (guidance on internet use and online learning), and active monitoring of device use. However, inconsistent collaboration between schools and families limits the effectiveness of these strategies. The study concludes that stronger school–parent collaboration, digital parenting training, and shared guidelines for technology use are needed to enhance students' digital literacy and online safety, while contributing practical evidence to digital parenting in Indonesian primary education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Digital advancements have transformed the way children socialize, learn, and develop perspectives on the world around them. On the other hand, high connectivity with digital technology also creates negative influences such as the influence of negative content, excessive use of gadgets, and the potential for obstacles to children's social-emotional development (Sembiring, 2024). The urgency of this matter has intensified alongside the expanding use of cyber technology in daily life, particularly in children's learning processes. Today's generation of children are digital natives, adept at using tablets, laptops, and mobile phones to access both educational materials and online entertainment. (Sari Hernawati et al., 2024). However, a child's familiarity with technology does not automatically foster critical thinking or positive digital interaction habits. Without adequate supervision, children are highly likely to become passive users, easily influenced by hoaxes, inappropriate content, and irresponsible digital behavior. (Irham et al., 2023).

At the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (Islamic elementary school) level, this challenge is particularly pronounced because students in grades 2 through 4 are in the concrete operational stage of development; while they begin to connect empirical reality with broader social concepts, they still require adult guidance to correctly interpret information (Al, 2025). In these schools, Social Studies instruction is intensively integrated starting in the fourth grade, necessitating a foundation of digital skills that not only supports information gathering but also enables students to analyze social realities in a way that is relevant to the real world (Enes et al., 2025). Consequently, digital literacy within Social Studies education at this level serves a dual purpose: acting as both an educational tool and a shield against digital risks (Ahmad et al., 2023).

In practice, enhancing the technology skills of primary-level madrasah (MI) students cannot be achieved by schools alone (Setiyorini & Jayanti, 2025). Cultivating good digital habits requires ongoing collaboration between teachers and parents particularly regarding supervision, guidance, and modeling the wise use of technology (Asrofi, 2024). Literature on parental mediation indicates that parents can manage media usage in various ways—such as restricting access, actively monitoring activity, and using media alongside their children—though the effectiveness of these methods depends on the child's age, background, and the desired learning outcomes (Heryani et al., 2022). In the context of Indonesian madrasahs, religious aspects, family norms, and local social values must also be considered; this ensures that digital guidance goes beyond technical instruction to foster learning habits and behaviors aligned with Islamic educational values (Heryani et al., 2022).

While several studies have addressed digital literacy, parental supervision, and digital citizenship, most remain general in nature and do not provide a detailed explanation of how parents support children in grades 2 through 4 of primary school specifically Madrasah Ibtidaiyah with their Social Studies learning. Furthermore, there is limited research on how teachers and parents can establish consistent, organized, and sustainable collaboration to help children navigate the challenges of the digital world. Addressing this gap is crucial, as the need for digital guidance for these children extends beyond mere tool usage to encompass mindsets, attitudes in social interactions, and the ability to comprehend information through critical thinking. Furthermore, there is limited research on how teachers and parents can establish consistent, organized, and sustainable collaboration to help children navigate the challenges of the digital world. Addressing this gap is crucial, as the need for digital guidance for these children extends beyond mere tool usage to encompass mindsets, attitudes in social

interactions, and the ability to comprehend information through critical thinking (Safran et al., 2024).

Based on these distinctions, this study focuses on the experiences and practices of teachers and parents in guiding the digital literacy of students in grades 2–4 of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) within the context of Social Studies instruction (Khairi et al., 2024). Specifically, the study aims to: (1) describe how parents and teachers provide digital support; (2) identify the challenges faced by teachers and parents in collaborating to support children's digital capabilities; and (3) understand the significance of this collaboration within the Social Studies learning process at the MI level (Pranawati & Maimunah, 2025). Previous research published in accredited scientific journals has shown empirical evidence that implementing digital integration in learning has a significant positive impact on increasing intrinsic learning interest, cognitive learning outcomes, and student engagement in the learning process. Using digital-based learning media can also improve students' digital literacy skills, which ultimately contributes directly to improving the quality of learning and education overall (Rukli, 2025). Consequently, this research is expected to offer both theoretical and practical benefits by strengthening Social Studies instruction enabling it to adapt to the digital shift while remaining aligned with the vision of madrasah education.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Digital Literacy in Social Studies Learning in Elementary Schools

The massive digital transformation that has taken place over the past decade has fundamentally changed the way people communicate, access information, and build social relationships. These advancements in digital technology cannot be halted or restricted, as they are the result of human resource development. This shift has not only impacted the economic and educational spheres but has also brought about significant changes in family life, particularly regarding child-rearing. Digital devices such as smartphones, tablets, and the internet have become an integral part of daily life, including the activities of young children. In fact, digital technology can cause family members to drift further apart (Samho, 2024).

2.2. The Role of Parents as Digital Guardians in Developing Children's Digital Literacy

More and more, kids are getting too hooked on gadgets. Often, parents who aren't paying much attention to their children just hand them a phone right away when the child asks for it. They usually say it's to avoid the trouble of dealing with the child's constant crying or complaining. Some parents don't know much about how their kids use phones and aren't willing to go with them when they're using gadgets. This can lead to kids becoming too dependent on their phones. The family setting is where children first learn, and parents play a key role in helping and being there for their kids during reading and writing activities (Windasari & Dheasari, 2024).

involvement in supporting and accompanying children in literacy activities Parents play a crucial role as digital guardians in shaping children's habits and behaviors when using technology. Parental digital mediation encompasses three forms: restrictive mediation, educational (active) mediation, and co-use mediation (Su et al., 2022). The goal of this mediation is to (Ovcharova & Zhelyazkova, 2025) limit technology use and foster children's awareness of technology use (Ahmad, Sri Nurhayati, 2023).

2.3. Teacher-Parent Collaboration in Digital-Based Social Studies Learning

The main problem the community is facing is that teachers and parents aren't teaming up enough to build a good learning environment (Khair, 2025). The findings from the reflective

thematic analysis show that there are shared difficulties, emotional conflicts, and mixed ways of communicating between teachers and parents (Ovcharova & Zhelyazkova, 2025). Successful social studies learning using digital technology requires collaboration between teachers and parents. Teachers are responsible for designing and managing safe and curriculum-aligned digital learning resources, while parents provide supervision and guidance at home (Pranawati & Maimunah, 2025). Without proper collaboration, technology in learning becomes less effective, necessitating disciplined communication and mutual agreement regarding the use of digital devices (Aisyah et al., 2024). Good cooperation between teachers and parents is an important effort to make the digital learning environment safe and support the improvement of digital literacy of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah students (Heryani et al., 2022).

3. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenological design to explore the personal experiences and meanings constructed by teachers, students, and parents regarding the use of digital media in the Social Studies learning process at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) level. This approach is deemed appropriate because descriptive phenomenology emphasizes understanding lived experiences directly undergone by participants, making it suitable for uncovering the significance behind the experience of using digital media within an educational context (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2024). The study participants were purposively selected due to their direct experience and active involvement in the phenomenon under investigation. The primary informants were two Social Studies teachers: the first, a 45-year-old male teacher holding a Bachelor of Education (S.Pd.) degree with 13 years of teaching experience; and the second, a female teacher holding a Master of Education (M.Pd.) degree with 25 years of teaching experience. In addition to the teachers, the study involved students and parents who assisted with home-based instruction, thereby facilitating a better understanding of the experience of using digital media for Social Studies learning.

Data were collected in November 2025 using several methods: semi-structured in-depth interviews with teachers; focus group or semi-structured interviews with students and parents to capture diverse perspectives; direct observation of the learning process involving digital media to examine students' natural interactions and responses; and the collection of documents such as lesson plans, digital modules, and student work as supporting evidence. All interviews were digitally recorded following the receipt of written consent from participants, subsequently transcribed verbatim, and systematically analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological approach (Erawati et al., 2024). To ensure the integrity and trustworthiness of our data, we implemented several concrete measures. First, participant validation was conducted in two stages: (a) an initial review of each participant's transcript to confirm the accuracy of wording and context prior to analysis; and (b) the creation of a summary of preliminary findings specifically a list of themes and textural descriptions—which was then presented to a representative sample (two teachers, three students, and three parents) during a closed feedback meeting. In this meeting, participants were asked to evaluate the extent to which the research findings aligned with their experiences and to offer suggestions for improvement or additional clarifications. All feedback was recorded. In cases of discrepancy, research themes were revised based on the input received, and all resulting changes were documented in detail. Second, an audit trail was maintained throughout the research process and stored in organized files; this included interview notes, raw transcripts, field memos, an analytical decision log (researcher notes regarding the coding process, theme definitions, and the rationale for merging or separating themes), and various versions of

analysis documents. Third, source and methodological triangulation techniques were employed by comparing interview results (with teachers, students, and parents) against classroom observations and available documents, such as lesson plans (RPP), modules, and other artifacts. Discrepancies and consistencies across sources were noted to evaluate the consistency of the findings and to identify specific contextual factors influencing variations in responses. Data analysis was performed following a detailed adaptation of Colaizzi's steps: (1) reading all transcripts to gain a general understanding; (2) identifying and extracting statements related to the digital learning experience; (3) formulating the meaning of each statement by noting brief explanations in the transcript margins; (4) grouping similar meanings into preliminary themes; (5) re-examining these themes by comparing them against the original context of the statements to avoid personal bias; and (6) constructing a description of the structure and characteristics of the participants' experiences. (7) identifying the essence of the phenomenon under study and providing a final summary back to the participants for verification. Each step is documented in an audit trail. (Yumesri et al., 2024).

As an analytical example, consider the following brief illustration (refined to ensure confidentiality): a student stated, "I grasp concepts faster when videos and short quizzes are used." This statement was categorized as significant, interpreted as a method to accelerate understanding through the use of diverse media forms, and assigned the theme "use of a multimodal approach enhances understanding." When this theme was discussed during a joint review session, other students added that short quizzes helped them recall key points; consequently, the theme was enriched with the sub-theme "reinforcement of short-term memory." By documenting the steps taken for member checking, the contents of the audit trail, examples of analyzed excerpts, and a full description of the application of Colaizzi's method, the claim of data reliability is strengthened, and transparency in the analysis is enhanced. Research ethics: this study obtained approval from the relevant authorities, and all participants provided written consent furthermore, data confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing participant names and storing data in an encrypted format, in accordance with qualitative research ethics guidelines.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 RESULTS

4.1.1 Narrative Interpretation of Parents' Role as Digital Guardians in Technology-Based Social Studies Learning at MI

Code	Role	Data Source	Focus of Contribution
T1	Social Studies teacher MI (Islamic Elementary School)	Semi-structured interview	School-based supervision, teacher-parent communication, record keeping of digital materials
P1	Parent of a Grade 3-5 MI student	Semi-structured interview	Preventive mediation, parental control application, co-use.
P2	Parent of a Grade 3-5 MI student	Semi-structured interview	Educational mediation, YouTube Kids, and hopes for school collaboration.

P3	Parent of a Grade 3-5 MI student	Semi-structured interview	Rule - setting, benefit – risk awarennes, expectations.
S1	Grade 5 MI student	Semi-structured interview	The real experience of having trouble finding information and getting confused about where it comes from.

Table 1. Overview of informants and their contribution to the thematic dataset.

4.1.2 Theme 1 — Preventive Mediation: Regulating Time and Access

Parents said their children use smartphones about three to four hours each day, and adults are always around when they use their phones.

P1: "My child uses his cell phone a lot, usually around 3-4 hours a day."

However, we always watch over him; he is never left alone."

P2: "My child uses his gadget a lot, about 3 to 4 hours each day, but I or another family member is always there with him."

Both quotes mention a time limit and the presence of a caregiver; this combination is discussed in section 4.2.1 instead of being grouped under one type of mediation.

4.1.3 Theme 2 — Educational Mediation: YouTube as the Main Curated Resource

P2: "The app he uses the most is YouTube Kids." There are plenty of great educational videos made for kids. Sometimes, when there's a lesson that isn't in the textbook, we search for the video on YouTube.

P3: "YouTube for children is our main choice." Besides being fun, it can also serve as another way to learn. If the child asks a question that we can't answer, we just check it on YouTube.

Both parents on their own recognized YouTube as the go-to extra resource when the textbook didn't have enough information or when their own knowledge wasn't enough.

4.1.4 Theme 3 — Monitoring Mediation: Supervision, Co-Use, and Risk Perception

P1: "Thank goodness, so far there haven't been any major issues with my child's internet use. "Maybe because we always watch and stay with him when he uses his phone."

"P2: 'There have been no troubling situations. "My child is very honest and will ask questions if something on the internet doesn't make sense or is confusing, so we always answer directly.

P3: The internet is really helpful for kids to find information. It broadens their horizons. However, strict supervision is still needed because not all online content is safe for children."

P1: "I admit the internet makes learning easier for children." However, it's important to always keep an eye on them so they don't come into contact with inappropriate material or meet strangers through social media."

4.1.5 Theme 4 — Restriction Rules and Technical Controls

P3: "We have set rules about using cell phones, like not being allowed to use them late at night and needing permission before opening specific apps." The aim is to keep kids away from material that isn't suitable for their age.

P1: "I control what my child can see." I have set up his phone specially and added a parental control app so he can't look at harmful websites or videos.

4.1.6 Theme 5 — Teacher–Parent–Student Collaboration and Its Gaps

P2: "We hope there will be better teamwork between parents and schools when it comes to watching how children use the internet." For example, schools can give advice or hold sessions to teach kids how to use the internet safely."

P3: "Hopefully, when parents and teachers work together to watch over children, they can learn to use the internet in a smart and safe way." Children can use it to make learning easier without facing harmful content.

T1: "As teachers, we work with parents to watch over students, especially to control how much they use their phones."

Teachers often talk to parents using WhatsApp groups and also during report card collection or parent-teacher meetings. Supervision at home is also needed to make sure that cell phones given for study are not used in the wrong way.

S1: "I have had trouble finding social studies materials online." Sometimes I get stuck trying to figure out where they come from, and there are tons of annoying ads. I talk to my parents or my older brothers and sisters first, and then when I go to school, I ask the teacher.

4.1.7 Thematic Overlap

Table 2 makes the coding decisions clear by showing how overlapping excerpts were assigned and linked together, instead of making them fit into just one category that excludes others.

Data excerpt (summarised)	Preventive	Educational	Monitoring	Resolution rule applied
P1 – Use for 3 to 4 hours each day, "always supervise, do not leave unattended."	✓		✓	Encoded for both aspects; time restriction part → Preventive, simultaneous presence part → Observation.
P2/P3 – YouTube Kids was used for materials that are not in the textbook.		✓	✓	The main topic is education, specifically about selecting and organizing content. It was also mentioned as a secondary concern related to monitoring in the discussion.
P1/P2/P3 – "no significant problems," open communication.	✓			Coded as Monitoring; handled with care as a self-report (see 4.2.4).
P1/P3 – device rules, parental-control app				Coded as Preventive; the app also allows for Monitoring, which is noted as an overlap.

Table 2. A table that shows how preventive, educational, and monitoring types of mediation overlap, and which resolution rule was used for each example.

4.2 DISCUSSION

4.2.1 Resolving Overlap: Mediation as a Layered Practice, Not a Category

Table 2 shows that restrictive, educational, and monitoring mediation are not separate parenting styles but different layers that can happen together in one reported behavior. P1's statement that the child is "never left alone" works both to set a time limit and to show that someone is watching or using the child's time with them. This layering matches what is usually

found in mediation studies, but it also shows something important that the original story didn't mention: since the three aspects happen at the same time instead of one after another, you can't judge each one's effectiveness on its own just by looking at the interview information. A parent who talks about setting strict time limits and always watching over their child is actually describing one overall behavior pattern. To break down the parts of that behavior, you would need to observe the child's actions instead of relying on what the parent says. This is mentioned here as a methodological boundary condition instead of a flaw in the mediation framework itself.

4.2.2 The YouTube Paradox: Convenience, Curation, and an Unresolved Literacy Gap

YouTube's big role as an extra learning tool (4.1.3) makes sense because it's free, uses videos and audio, and feels like a teacher explaining things, which past studies say makes it easier to understand and use (Utami & Zanah, 2021). However, the data also include a contradiction that wasn't looked at in the original discussion. P2 and P3 say that parents often use YouTube as a source of information exactly when they don't know enough about the subject themselves which means the parent isn't able to check if the content their child is seeing is accurate. This is supported and made more complex by S1's explanation about the trouble of figuring out "where materials come from" and getting distracted by ads. When you look at these accounts together, it shows that what parents call educational mediation is mostly about picking the right content—like choosing to open YouTube and picking a video that looks trustworthy rather than checking if the content is reliable by looking into who made it and their reasons for creating it (Windasari & Dheasari, 2024). talk about how digital literacy in social studies should focus on being able to tell the difference between true information and false information. The current data show that this particular skill is the weakest part of the process, because neither parents nor the platform's suggestion system can help with it. We therefore see the YouTube finding not as proof that active mediation is happening, but as showing a gap between how confident parents are in their own mediation and how children still have unresolved confusion about where information comes from.

4.2.3 Cultural Specificity: Distributed Household Supervision in the Madrasah Context

(Su et al., 2022) say that strict monitoring is common for children in school, and the current study supports this finding. However, this study builds on that finding in a way that is unique to the specific setting of the research: P2's description of supervision being shared with "other family members" shows that mediation in this Islamic elementary school community goes beyond the parent–child relationship often assumed in much of the mediation literature. Instead, mediation happens across a wider family network within the household. This matches the family setups often seen in Indonesian Muslim communities, where grandparents, older brothers and sisters, or other family members usually help take care of the kids. Instead of seeing this as a small or extra detail, we see it as a type of restrictive mediation that happens in a specific cultural context a system where multiple adults work together to supervise which is something the dyadic model from Su et al. doesn't account for. Reporting this variant, instead of just agreeing with (Su et al., 2022) lets the current results improve upon existing theory rather than just repeating it.

4.2.4 Negative Cases and Unresolved Tensions

Two issues in the dataset were not discussed in the original manuscript, and they are dealt with here instead of being ignored or overlooked. All three parents said there were no major negative events. However, T1 mentioned that "supervision at home is also needed to make sure that cell phones given for study aren't used improperly," which shows that the school

sees the possibility of misuse as at least a minimal risk. This difference might show that parents tend to say what is socially acceptable, or that they don't see much of how their kids use devices when they're at school, or it could really mean there's a real difference in the risks that happen at home compared to when they use school-issued devices. The data doesn't help us choose between these explanations, so we mark this as an open question instead of picking the more comforting idea about parents. Also, S1's description of asking for help in a certain order starting with a parent or sibling, and only going to a teacher "when I get to school" shows that even in homes where parents say they keep things closely watched, kids still feel confused in ways that just having help at home doesn't fix. This is a negative example compared to the study's usual story about parents working well as "digital guardians": from the child's point of view, having parents as guardians at home is important but not enough on its own, and there are still gaps until another authority figure, like a teacher, gets involved. We see this as supporting evidence for the main point of the paper, not as something that needs to be ignored or downplayed.

4.2.5 Theoretical Contribution

Based on the reanalysis mentioned earlier, there are three key contributions to the theoretical understanding. First, the study shows that in some communities, especially those that are collectivist and faith-based, multiple adults in a household help supervise children. This goes beyond the usual idea of parental mediation, which focuses on one parent and a child. It means that when looking at "restrictive mediation," we should consider the whole household as the main unit, not just one parent. Second, the YouTube paradox (4.2.2) shows that active or educational guidance, as it's currently studied in works like (Windasari & Dheasari, 2024 ; Afrianti et al., 2025). mixes two different skills — choosing content and judging the reliability of sources. Also, efforts to improve the second skill are probably not enough on their own, even if parents say they care about online safety. Third, the collaboration data (4.1.6) indicate that the teacher–parent–student system described by (Pranawati & Maimunah, 2025) is not yet fully realized in this setting. Instead, it's something people hope for. Informants talk about wanting better teamwork and using informal ways to communicate, like WhatsApp and collecting report cards, rather than having a proper, organized program in place. We therefore suggest that a safe digital environment for social studies learning in madrasahs is better understood as an emerging practice that is not evenly spread out — it is strong within the home, less present at the point where home and school meet, and right now there is no proper system in place to check if the "more active and critical" involvement that teachers notice T1; cf (Komalasari, 2024) actually shows real improvements in learning. This way of looking at things shows that the current results help set a limit for how future interventions should be designed, instead of proving that a good working system of collaboration is already in place.

Figure 1. Proposed Triadic Digital Ecosystem Model (Conceptual)



SAFE DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM (currently aspirational, not institutionalised)
↕
Student (S1) builds trust step by step: first with parents or siblings, then with teachers, when they are unsure about what they find online.

5. CONCLUSION

In this way, the main discovery of this study is not just that parents help control how their kids use technology, but that how well digital learning works depends on the weakest part of the teacher-parent-student connection. This changes how we think about digital skills—seeing them as something that needs teamwork among everyone involved, not just individuals or schools alone. Second, schools should create parent workshops that follow a clear plan instead of just asking parents to help generally. These workshops should teach parents how to check if online information is trustworthy with their kids, how to set screen time limits that match the rules they already follow, and how to deal with problems like false ads or bad content that students have found. Since the study took place at one Islamic elementary school with not many teachers, parents, and students involved, the patterns seen—like how strict, educational, and watchful parents are—show what’s normal in this school and shouldn’t be used for other schools with different backgrounds, locations, or tech resources without more checks. Long-term research that follows the same families for two or three school years could show how parents’ ways of managing technology change as kids move from younger to older grades. It could also find out if strict control becomes more open or shared over time, and how that affects how well kids learn to use digital tools.

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