



Family Counseling Strategies to Increase Generation Z Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze technology-based family counseling strategies to increase the involvement of Generation Z parents in early childhood education. Generation Z, known as digital-natives, exhibits distinctive engagement patterns, relying on educational apps, online communication groups, and social media to monitor children's development, but faces challenges such as time management, digital fatigue, and misalignment of home parenting styles with school expectations. The research method used a descriptive qualitative approach through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation with 20 Gen Z parents at the Lubuk Linggau Early Childhood Education (PAUD) institution. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, including reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results showed that family counseling strategies that integrate technology, time management training, and collaborative parent-teacher forums significantly increased parents' awareness, confidence, and skills in supporting children's learning, both at home and at school. This counseling is in line with Bowen's family systems theory which emphasizes the impact of behavioral changes on overall family dynamics, and Baumrind's democratic parenting theory which is in line with the values of freedom and dialogue held by Gen Z parents. These findings strengthen previous research on parental involvement, while offering a novelty in the form of an adaptive family counseling model that suits Generation Z's digital communication style. The implications of this research emphasize the importance of developing flexible, interactive, and technology-based family counseling programs to encourage ongoing parental involvement to support optimal early childhood development.

Keywords: Family Counseling, Generation Z, Parents, Early Childhood Education

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INTRODUCTION

The role of parents in early childhood education determines a child's socio-emotional, cognitive, and moral development (Azarine & Hendriani, 2023). This is because children are in their most rapid growth period during early childhood, where parents are the first and primary educators, providing an important foundation for their personality (Ferdian Utama, 2020). In the socio-emotional aspect, children learn to recognize and manage their emotions through daily interactions with their parents. Affection, attention, and consistent

parenting foster a child's self-confidence, empathy, and ability to build positive relationships with others. (Age & Hamzanwadi, 2020) . In cognitive development, stimulation provided by parents such as reading stories, playing educational games, or engaging in dialogue helps develop children's language, thinking skills, and creativity. A home environment rich in learning experiences also supports their readiness to enter formal education (Sugiarto, 2023) . Meanwhile, children's moral development is greatly influenced by parental role models, where values such as honesty, responsibility, and discipline are instilled through habits and real examples in everyday life (Utama & Dea, 2023) . Therefore, active parental involvement in early childhood education is an important foundation for developing healthy, independent, and character-based children in the future (Al-Elaimat, Adheisat, & Alomyan, 2020) .

However, Generation Z, many of whom are now parents, faces unique challenges in their involvement in early childhood education (Sihura, 2018) . As digital natives, they have a mindset that is very familiar with technology and tend to rely on digital devices in various aspects of their lives, including parenting (Oerther & Oerther, 2021) . This attachment to technology, on the one hand, provides easy access to information and learning resources, but on the other hand, it can reduce the quality of direct interactions between parents and children (Saleha, Baharun, & Utami, 2022) . Furthermore, the demands of flexible work, such as remote work or freelance work, force them to balance professional responsibilities with their role as primary educators for their children. Their parenting styles, which tend to differ from previous generations—more egalitarian, dialogue-based, and emphasizing children's freedom—sometimes create a distance from formal educational expectations in schools. These factors can influence the level of involvement of Generation Z as parents in supporting optimal social-emotional, cognitive, and moral development of children (Medez & Marte-Gayoles, 2021) .

However, reports from early childhood education institutions also indicate low levels of active participation among Generation Z parents in various aspects of their children's education, such as participation in school activities, intense communication with teachers, and home learning support (Suryani, 2023) . This phenomenon is often caused by a fast-paced lifestyle, attachment to technology, and work demands that require flexible time, so that Gen Z parents often experience difficulty dividing their focus between work responsibilities and direct involvement in their children's education. In addition, some of them tend to rely on digital technology as a means of communication and stimulation for their children, which can indirectly reduce face-to-face interaction with teachers and children (Triawanto, 2023) . This low level of involvement impacts the effectiveness of early childhood education, particularly in the development of socio-emotional, cognitive, and moral aspects that require strong synergy between schools and families.

Family counseling is seen as an effective strategy to help Generation Z parents understand their important role in early childhood education, overcome various barriers to involvement, and build constructive collaboration with schools (Marhayati, 2024) . Through family counseling, parents can gain a deeper understanding of their children's social-emotional, cognitive, and moral developmental needs, while also finding ways to balance the demands of work, a digital lifestyle, and parenting roles (Myers, 2022) . This approach also provides space for Gen Z parents to explore more effective communication strategies with teachers and improve their skills in guiding their children at home (Metcalf, 2021) . Thus, family counseling can be a bridge that strengthens the synergy between home and school in supporting the optimal growth and development of early childhood.

Epstein's (1995) theory of parental involvement describes six dimensions of involvement: home care, communication with the school, volunteering, home learning, decision-making, and community collaboration. Active parental participation has been shown to improve early childhood academic achievement and social development, but this approach needs to be adapted to the characteristics of Gen Z parents who have a digital

lifestyle and a preference for technology-based communication. Family counseling theory, as explained by Bowen (1978), emphasizes that the family is an interdependent system, where changes in one member affect the entire system. Family counseling can improve communication patterns, increase role awareness, and strengthen emotional support among family members, thereby helping Gen Z parents overcome barriers to their involvement. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of development also explains that children develop within a system of interconnected influences, including family and school; parental involvement serves as an important bridge between the home environment and formal education in early childhood education to support children's cognitive, social-emotional, and moral development. Meanwhile, generational theory explains that Gen Z, as digital natives, has an instant communication style, multitasking, and a preference for practical approaches, so counseling strategies need to be designed flexibly, technology-based, and interactive to be more effective. Furthermore, self-awareness theory (Goleman, 1995) and empowerment theory (Zimmerman, 2000) emphasize that increased self-awareness can encourage Gen Z parents to better understand their important roles, manage time well, and set priorities to be actively involved in early childhood education.

Several previous studies have reinforced the urgency of developing family counseling strategies to increase the involvement of Generation Z parents in early childhood education. Nurul Fatonah (2020) examined the role of parents in early childhood literacy development and found that reading, storytelling, and literacy stimulation activities conducted at home significantly influenced the development of children's literacy skills. This study emphasized that parental involvement not only impacts children's academic readiness but also shapes positive communication and interaction patterns within the family environment. However, adjustments to the form of involvement are needed to suit the dynamics of young families and the characteristics of digital generations like Gen Z. Another study by Sari and Maningtyas (2020) examined parental involvement in distance learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. The results of this study showed that many parents experienced obstacles, including limited time due to work, difficulty understanding the subject matter, and technological constraints.

However, consistent involvement has been shown to increase children's learning motivation and academic achievement. These findings suggest that support for parents, including through family counseling services, is crucial in helping them overcome these challenges. Furthermore, Sri Nurhayati (2020), in her research on parental involvement in early childhood education for family empowerment in the digital era, revealed that the use of digital media, voluntary participation in school activities, and involvement in decision-making not only have a positive impact on child development but also increase the family's capacity as a unified support system. These three studies consistently demonstrate that parental involvement, whether through home learning activities, online learning assistance, or active participation at school, is a crucial factor in the success of early childhood education. However, they also indicate a gap: there are not many family counseling strategies specifically designed to address the challenges and characteristics of Generation Z as parents. Therefore, research on adaptive, technology-based, and empowering family counseling strategies for Gen Z parents is highly relevant to bridging children's educational needs with Generation Z's lifestyle and communication preferences.

This study aims to describe the level of involvement of Gen Z parents in early childhood education, identify the obstacles they face, formulate family counseling strategies that suit their characteristics, and analyze the effectiveness of these strategies. Theoretically, the benefits of this study are to enrich the literature on family counseling and the involvement of Gen Z parents in early childhood education, while practically, it provides recommendations to counselors, PAUD teachers, and schools to design counseling programs that suit the needs of Gen Z.

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study to explore family counseling strategies that can increase the involvement of Generation Z parents in early childhood education. A qualitative approach was chosen because this research aims to understand the phenomenon contextually, namely how Gen Z parents interpret their involvement in their children's education and how family counseling can facilitate behavioral changes (Sugiono, 2022). The research subjects were Generation Z parents with children aged 4–6 years old enrolled in several early childhood education institutions in the Lubuk Linggau area. They were selected purposively, with the criteria of having experience participating in family counseling programs or parenting coaching from the school. Supporting informants consisted of class teachers and family counselors involved in the program. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore parents' perceptions, experiences, barriers, and expectations regarding their involvement, as well as participant observation of counseling and parenting activities at school, such as parent-teacher meetings, home learning, and activities with children. In addition, a documentation study was conducted on teacher-parent communication records, attendance lists, and counseling materials used. Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles, MB, Huberman, AM, & Saldana, 2018). Data validity was strengthened by triangulation of sources, methods, and member checking with participants. The results of the analysis are expected to produce a comprehensive picture of the involvement patterns of Gen Z parents, the barriers they face, and effective family counseling strategies to increase this involvement. This study will also formulate practical recommendations for schools and family counselors to design counseling programs that are appropriate to the characteristics and needs of Generation Z.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Generation Z Parental Involvement in Early Childhood Education

The involvement of Generation Z parents in early childhood education differs from that of previous generations due to the influence of technological developments, changing work patterns, and digital lifestyles. Generation Z is a group of parents born and raised in the technology era, so the use of digital devices has become part of their daily lives. In the context of early childhood education, they often rely on educational apps, online communication groups, and social media to monitor their children's development and maintain communication with teachers. In the context of early childhood education, Generation Z parents tend to utilize various digital platforms to monitor their children's development and maintain communication with schools. Educational apps, online communication groups such as WhatsApp or Telegram, and social media are the most frequently used means to obtain information about learning activities, children's skill development, and school announcements. This use of technology allows them to stay connected despite their busy and flexible work schedules.

This technology-based engagement brings both convenience and challenges. On the one hand, parents can access information quickly and efficiently, monitoring their children's learning anytime and anywhere. However, on the other hand, more online interaction can reduce the quality of face-to-face communication with both teachers and children, which should be a crucial foundation in early childhood education. Therefore, while technology facilitates engagement, a balance is still needed between the use of digital devices and the direct presence of parents to accompany their children. As digital natives, Generation Z parents tend to prefer fast, concise, and practical communication methods. They prefer to convey questions or information via text message rather than meeting in person at school. While this method is efficient, the depth of interaction with teachers and school officials is

sometimes reduced, which can ultimately affect parents' understanding of their children's educational needs. Regarding parenting patterns, as shown in the following interview data:

Table 1. Interview Data on Parenting of Gen Z Parents

No	Parents' Initials (Gen Z)	Interview Questions	Answer
1	AR	What parenting style do you apply at home?	"I give my children the freedom to choose, for example, what they want to play or study. But I still provide guidance if there's anything that needs improvement."
2	BN	Do you often have dialogues with your children about everyday decisions?	"Yes, I prefer to talk rather than give orders. I want my children to learn to take responsibility for their choices."
3	CR	How do you divide your time between work and your children's education?	"It's really difficult because I work a hybrid job. Sometimes I have to work out of town. I try to set aside time in the evenings to chat with them or guide them on their assignments."
4	DS	Does your parenting style align with the methods at your child's school?	"Not always. I'm flexible at home, but I'm more strict at school. Sometimes kids get confused about which rule to follow."
5	ET	How do you ensure your involvement has an impact on your child's development?	"I participate in school activities if they clearly benefit my child's development. For example, there's a parenting workshop or detailed progress reports."
6	FM	What is your biggest obstacle to attending school activities?	"Time management. My work schedule often changes, so I can't always be there. Luckily, there's the WhatsApp group and updates from my teachers."
7	GP	What are your views on information transparency from schools?	"Very important. If I have regular, clear reports, I can see where my child is developing and where he needs help."
8	HQ	Do you need additional support from your school regarding parenting in the digital age?	"Yes, I need guidance on how to guide my child in dealing with the influence of gadgets and the internet, so they don't take the wrong steps."

Based on the data above, Generation Z parents prioritize freedom, equality, and a dialogue-based approach. They encourage their children to think independently, make their own choices, and learn from experience. This parenting style reflects more egalitarian values than previous generations, but sometimes clashes with formal educational expectations, which emphasize structure and discipline. A major challenge faced by Generation Z parents is time management. The demands of flexible work, such as remote work or part-time employment, often force them to juggle professional responsibilities and involvement in their children's education. Their multitasking lifestyles can also reduce opportunities for physical attendance at school activities or assisting their children with learning at home. Furthermore, Generation Z parents have a high need for transparency and clear information from schools. They tend to be motivated to be more actively involved

when they can see a direct link between their participation and their children's developmental outcomes. Their involvement is goal-driven, meaning they want to ensure the time and energy they invest has a tangible positive impact on their children. On the other hand, Generation Z parents feel the need for emotional and educational support in understanding their children's social-emotional development, especially in facing the challenges of the digital era that impact children's behavior and social interactions. Therefore, schools' strategic approaches need to be adaptive, utilizing technology while strengthening direct collaboration between parents and educators for optimal early childhood development.

Interviews revealed that Generation Z parents tend to adopt parenting styles that prioritize freedom, equality, and a dialogue-based approach. They give their children the space to choose and take responsibility for their decisions. This finding aligns with Diana Baumrind's (1966) theory of democratic parenting, which states that democratic parenting encourages children to develop independence, creativity, and responsibility through two-way communication and the provision of directed freedom (Tobing & Nurjannah, 2024). Some parents reported difficulty dividing their time between work and their children's education due to flexible work demands and multitasking lifestyles. This supports the concept of work-life balance according to Greenhaus and Allen (2011), who explain that role conflict between work and family can reduce parents' emotional involvement in their children's education (Greenhaus, Ziegert, & Allen, 2012). Gen Z parents who work hybrid or remote work often experience "flexibility stress," which is a confusion about the distinction between work time and family time.

Furthermore, the need for transparency of information from schools demonstrates the characteristics of goal-oriented engagement. Parents are more motivated to engage when they see a tangible impact of their participation on their child's development. This is relevant to Epstein's Framework of Parental Involvement (1995), which explains that parental participation increases when schools provide clear, consistent, and needs-based communication. Some parents also acknowledged the need for emotional and educational support, particularly regarding childcare in the digital age. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) developmental ecology theory, which emphasizes the importance of synergy between microsystems (family and school) in providing a supportive environment for child development. Technological changes, as part of the macrosystem, influence parenting patterns and children's social-emotional interactions, necessitating guidance from the school. Furthermore, a mismatch between flexible parenting patterns at home and discipline at school can lead to confusion in children. According to Patterson's (1982) theory of parenting consistency, differences in rules between home and school can hinder the development of adaptive behavior in children. Therefore, close cooperation between parents and teachers is needed to align educational approaches so that children's social-emotional development remains optimal.

Effectiveness of Family Counseling Strategies to Increase Parental Involvement

The implementation of technology-based and collaborative family counseling strategies has been shown to increase parental awareness of the importance of their involvement. This counseling program helps parents understand their role as their children's first educators, overcome obstacles such as time management and lack of understanding of learning methods, and build more effective communication with teachers. This counseling approach aligns with Bowen's (1978) family systems theory, which emphasizes that changes in one family member impact the overall family dynamic. With counseling, parents are more prepared and confident to actively engage, both in supporting learning at home and participating in school activities. This is supported by the following observational data:

Table 2. Observation of Counseling Activities

No	Date	Counseling Activities	Observation Findings
1	05/07/2025	Online counseling sessions via Zoom	Parents actively asked about how to support their children learning at home. Most appeared focused during the session.
2	12/07/2025	Time management training for parents	Some Gen Z parents find tips on using digital schedules to manage their children's time helpful.
3	07/19/2025	Parent-teacher collaborative discussion forum	Two-way communication is more intense; parents are starting to openly share challenges with school engagement.
4	07/26/2025	Individual follow-up counseling	Parents showed an increased understanding of their role as the first educators at home.
5	02/08/2025	Evaluation of counseling program	More than 80% of parents feel more confident about being involved in their child's learning at home.

Technology-based and collaborative family counseling strategies enable digitally-savvy Generation Z parents to more easily access materials, discuss issues, and receive personalized support. This counseling helps parents understand their role as their children's first educators, while addressing common barriers such as time constraints, flexible work demands, and a lack of understanding of the learning methods used in schools. Interview data also indicates:

Table 4. Interviews about Counseling for Parents

No	Parents' Initials (Gen Z)	Interview Questions	Answer
1	AR	How does this counseling help you understand your role as a first educator?	"I realized that my role is not just to accompany, but to set an example and guide my children every day."
2	BN	Does this program help you overcome your time constraints?	"Yes, I learned to manage my schedule using an app, so I can make time specifically for my children without it interfering with my work."
3	CR	Has your communication with teachers changed after counseling?	"It's smoother, now I'm more active in asking questions and giving feedback through the school's WhatsApp group."
4	DS	What is most beneficial about this technology-based counseling?	"I can participate without having to come to school, so even though I'm busy with work, I can still get the material and discussions."
5	ET	How does this counseling affect your involvement in school?	"I have become more confident in participating in school activities, and now I understand why parental involvement is important."

Observational data showed an increase in parental participation and understanding during the program. During the online counseling session via Zoom (July 5, 2025), most parents were seen actively asking questions about how to support their children learning at home, and the majority demonstrated high levels of focus throughout the session. Furthermore, time management training (July 12, 2025) had a significant impact, with several Gen Z parents reporting helpful tips on using digital schedules to manage their children's time, enabling them to spend quality time amidst their busy work schedules. A collaborative discussion forum between parents and teachers (July 19, 2025) also demonstrated improvements in two-way communication. Parents began to openly share challenges to their involvement in school and obtained practical solutions through direct dialogue with teachers. In the follow-up individual counseling session (July 26, 2025), parents' understanding of their role as first educators became increasingly evident, as they began to recognize the importance of being role models for their children in their daily lives. Program evaluation (02/08/2025) showed that more than 80% of parents felt more confident in being involved in their children's learning at home, both in the form of assisting with learning assignments and attending school activities.

Interview findings support these observations. AR, a parent, stated that the counseling made her realize that a parent's role is not just to accompany them, but also to set an example and guide their children every day. BN added that the time management training provided helped her organize her schedule using digital apps, allowing her to set aside dedicated time for her children without disrupting her work. CR acknowledged an improvement in the quality of communication with teachers, as she is now more active in asking questions and providing feedback through the school's WhatsApp group. DS highlighted the key benefit of technology-based counseling, which allows her to stay current with material and discussions despite her busy work schedule without having to attend school in person. Meanwhile, ET felt more confident participating in school activities after understanding the importance of parental involvement in supporting children's development. Overall, both observational and interview data indicate that this family counseling strategy has been successful in strengthening the involvement of Generation Z parents, improving communication with teachers, and building their readiness and confidence in supporting their children's learning, both at home and at school.

Furthermore, family counseling encourages more effective communication between parents and teachers. With a better understanding of their child's development, parents become more confident in supporting learning at home and participating in school activities. This approach aligns with Bowen's (1978) family systems theory, which states that behavioral changes in one family member will positively impact the overall family dynamic. When parents experience increased understanding and skills, the child's learning environment at home becomes more conducive, and the relationship with the school becomes more harmonious.

Although family counseling has proven effective, this study also identified several challenges, such as digital fatigue, poor time management skills, and differing expectations between parents and schools. Therefore, family counseling needs to be designed adaptively, utilizing technology without burdening parents, and incorporating materials to strengthen self-awareness and time management. This strategy is expected to not only increase parental involvement but also empower them to become active partners in early childhood education. Practical implications: Early childhood education institutions and family counselors need to develop counseling models that are flexible, interactive, and tailored to the communication styles of Generation Z to ensure sustainable engagement.

The novelty of this study lies in the development of a family counseling strategy specifically designed to increase the involvement of Generation Z parents in early childhood education, utilizing a technological and collaborative approach that aligns with the digital-native characteristics of Gen Z parents. This study found that Gen Z parents tend to rely on

fast and convenient online communication through educational apps, WhatsApp groups, and social media, but often face obstacles such as poor time management, digital fatigue, and a mismatch between flexible parenting patterns at home and disciplinary demands at school. The technology-based counseling strategy implemented in this study addresses these challenges by providing time management training, strengthening two-way communication with teachers, and helping parents understand their role as the first educators at home. This approach is strengthened by Bowen's (1978) family systems theory, which emphasizes that behavioral changes in one family member can have a positive impact on the entire family system, as well as Baumrind's (1966) democratic parenting theory, which is relevant to the values of freedom, equality, and dialogue held by Gen Z parents.

The results of this study also expand on previous research findings. For example, a study by Smith & Lee (2021) showed that the use of digital platforms improves parent-teacher communication, but does not address the challenge of limited physical parental presence. Another study by Hernández et al. (2022) confirmed that online parenting programs can improve parents' understanding of their roles, but they do not integrate the time management training that Gen Z parents desperately need. Meanwhile, research by Liu & Zhang (2023) highlighted that digital-native parents' engagement is often goal-oriented, yet they lack support for building quality face-to-face communication with their children. Therefore, this study addresses this gap through a family counseling strategy that combines technological approaches, time management training, and strengthening two-way communication, which has been empirically proven to increase Gen Z parents' confidence and readiness to support their children's learning. Overall, the novelty of this study lies in the integration of a technology-based family counseling approach that adapts to the needs and communication styles of Gen Z parents, a topic that has not been widely explored in previous research. This provides a practical contribution for PAUD institutions and family counselors in designing relevant mentoring models, as well as enriching academic studies on parental involvement in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that Generation Z parents' involvement in early childhood education has unique characteristics, influenced by their digital-native background, multitasking lifestyle, and need for time flexibility. Gen Z parents rely on technology such as educational apps, online communication groups, and social media to monitor their children's development and interact with teachers. However, time constraints, digital fatigue, and misalignment between home parenting and school expectations are key barriers. Technology-based and collaborative family counseling strategies have proven effective in increasing parental role awareness, improving time management, and strengthening communication between parents and teachers. Through counseling, Gen Z parents become more confident and skilled in supporting their children's learning at home and actively participating in school activities. This approach also empowers parents to become equal partners in the educational process, in line with democratic parenting theory and family systems theory. These findings reinforce previous research on the importance of parental involvement in early childhood education, while also providing novelty by designing a counseling model that suits the characteristics of Gen Z. The results imply that PAUD institutions and family counselors need to develop counseling programs that are adaptive, interactive, and utilize technology so that parental involvement can be maintained sustainably to support the optimal development of early childhood.

Based on the research results, there are several recommendations that can be considered. First, PAUD institutions are advised to provide family counseling programs that utilize technology, such as online discussion forums, child learning management applications, and digital progress reports, to suit the communication styles of Gen Z. Second,

family counselors need to develop counseling materials that include time management, balancing technology use, and strengthening the role of parents as primary educators. Third, it is important for Generation Z parents to maintain a balance between digital involvement and physical presence in their children's education, and to actively build two-way communication with teachers. Fourth, for future researchers, it is recommended to explore the long-term effectiveness of technology-based family counseling strategies in increasing parental involvement and its impact on children's social-emotional development.

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