

Chapter 17

Does Gadget Usage Hamper the Psychological Aspects of Pre-Schoolers?

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ABSTRACT

The society is keen to rely on gadgets in everyday life due to versatile gadgets that help them to connect with the world in the 21st century. On the flip side of using gadgets, several researches argued that screen time is affecting children's psychosocial, behavioural and health problems. The present study interviewed 14 preschool teachers to perceive their knowledge in gadget usage, sedentary behaviour and social skills among preschoolers. Besides that, teaching methods and teachers' opinions on gadget usage were also discussed. Inductive analysis (IA) revealed that parents habitually offer children gadgets at home. Also, the teachers expressed a positive opinion on gadget usage where preschoolers simply learn from media and gadget's applications. However, the teachers asserted that usage time needs to be controlled and the amount of usage depends on the role of parents and teachers. Teachers' attitude and habits were found to be moderate in lesson planning and improving the social skills of preschoolers but minimal for addressing their sedentary behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

“Play is not simply the child's world but it is also influenced by what is promoted or constrained by adults, which in turn is influenced by the complexities of the social and cultural worlds that children inhabit” (Kernan, 2007). This statement disclosed the importance of the role of adults in providing play

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and hence indirectly affecting the children's development with different social and cultural backgrounds. For instance, back in the 90's, children were actively playing outdoor activities (climbing trees, playing tags, etc.) and traditional toys in Malaysia (*congkak*, *gasing*, *wau bulan*). This was perhaps due to most parents could not afford to buy gadgets for children since they were costly and not up-to-date. Interestingly, Janson (Janson, 2012) illustrated that children who were in preschools should remain doing activities such as climbing stairs, playing outside, walking or dancing to music in order to develop movement skills and social skills. On the other hand, in the new digital age, gadgets are accessible for all ages. Children started to access technology and screen media in early childhood programs, as young as infants (L. O'Connor, The Huffington Post, 2013). In the millennial generation, young children are living in a comfort zone but in a world of "interactive media", which refers to "digital and analog materials, including software programs, applications (apps), broadcast and streaming media, some children's television programs, e-books, the Internet, and other forms of content designed to facilitate active and creative use by young children and to encourage social engagement with other children and adults" (NAEYC, Fred Rogers Center, 2012). These activities that they mostly get in touch with use gadgets (tablet, smartphone) which function as "all-in-one devices" and therefore restrict physical activities and social interactions. These statements in essence displayed the different generations of "play" in early childhood development and therefore, it is a rich area to explore how gadget usage affects sedentary behaviour and social skills among pre-schoolers. This chapter will discuss about:

1. The background of using gadgets and its circumstances in sedentary behaviour and social skills among pre-schoolers,
2. Myth of being savvy-teach: whether gadget usage hampers or fosters the development of children,
3. The results of the qualitative study, and
4. Discussion, future research, direction and conclusion.

BACKGROUND

Over the last twenty years, children were physically active and their activities were playing in the playground, cycling in the park and building sandcastles on the beach. They had plenty of fun by moving around and chit chatting with peers and adults. However, in this new millennium, physical activity has dramatically reduced and technology has replaced the fun of physical play from "eye-to-eye contact" which had evolved into "eye-to-screen contact". For instance, a new study from Common Sense Media from the United States revealed that 38 percent of children under two have used smartphones during their waking hours (O'Connor, 2013) and this number has increased to 72 percent, more specifically to children aged zero to eight that have already used mobile devices (Common Sense Research Study, 2013). In addition, statistic report from (the Asian parent Insight, 2014) revealed that 98 percent parents in Asian countries allowed children aged three to eight use devices. More importantly, 25 percent of the children were using devices for gaming. These statistics stressed out that younger children are actively using gadgets no matter where they are and transformed traditional games into technology games. To date, researchers are prompting to study the "new media" and found that children and teenagers are fascinated in gadgets since at a younger age (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2005).

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