ISSE
International Journal of Service Science, Management, Engineering, and Technology
pISSN 2964-7118, eISSN 2830-604X

THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN PREVENTING GADGET ADDICTION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

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Abstract - *Early childhood screen time addiction has become an increasingly profound issue in modern society. Parents have a crucial role to play in preventing such addiction and ensuring healthy child development. This study aims to identify the appropriate role of parents in the prevention of early childhood screen time addiction. The type of research used is qualitative research with a case study approach. Qualitative methods were chosen to obtain an overview and describe how the role of parents in preventing gadget addiction in early childhood. The sources of this research consist of two sources, including primary and secondary sources. The findings show that gadget addiction in early childhood can have a negative impact on physical, mental and social aspects. Parents have a vital role to guide their children to use technology wisely and healthily. Through supervision and a positive approach, parents can help prevent the negative impact of gadget addiction on children. By educating children about screen time limits, ensuring that the content accessed is appropriate for their age and maturity level, and encouraging physical activity, creativity and social interaction outside of the digital world, parents can help create a healthy and balanced environment for children. In addition, open communication and empathy are key to a healthy.*

Keywords: parents, gadget prevention, early childhood, technology development

INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalization, there is a development of technology that is increasingly sophisticated and developed. Its influence is felt in various aspects of human life patterns, both patterns of thought and behavior. One of the technological developments that influence human thinking is gadget, a medium used as a modern means of communication (Wahyudi et al., 2021). Gadgets are used by a person as a tool to carry out social interactions easily, especially to make social contact and communicate with one another. By using gadgets, interactions between individuals can occur without time constraints (Ilyas et al., 2013). Over time, gadgets that could only be purchased by those with high income can now be purchased by anyone, including those with modest income, at an affordable price or through a periodic payment system. Today's gadget users can utilize them to get additional information and as a means of entertainment.

On gadgets there is a variety of content that can be accessed easily by various groups, ranging from the elderly to children. The use of gadgets by early childhood (ages 1-6 years) can have a good or bad impact depending on the control exercised by parents when these children use gadgets (Fadila & Wardhani, 2022). Early childhood is a group of children who are in the process of unique growth and development, including fine and gross motor coordination, intelligence, social emotional, language, and communication. Early childhood is considered a golden age that provides great opportunities to develop all aspects of child development (Halliday, 2014).

This condition shows that stimulating children's development according to the developmental stage is very important to develop children's abilities by building their own knowledge (Issalillah & Khayru, 2021). Children at an early age are experiencing a critical phase of character building, social development, and cognitive skills. Therefore, in the critical phase of early childhood development, the role of parents is very important to guide and protect children from potential negative impacts.

The first environment that has an influence on the growth and development of children or the younger generation is by parents (Dacholfany & Hasanah, 2021). As a family component, parents, consisting of fathers and mothers, consciously educate their children to reach maturity. The heavy responsibility for providing guidance to children is carried out by parents, and the first task carried out by father and mother figures is to shape the child's personality with full responsibility in an atmosphere of harmony between parents and children. The important role of parents is also found in efforts to develop children's character. Quality character needs to be formed and nurtured from an early age. Failed character cultivation in a person from an early age will form a problematic personality in adulthood. Since children always go through various stages of development, parents should provide direction that is appropriate to the child's stage of development (Rowe, 2008). This implies that parents are primarily responsible for their children's lives, which are geared towards preparing themselves for the future.

The role of parents also holds an important position over their children, and can simply be explained as the obligations of parents to children. These obligations include setting an example and educating the child properly, which

the child will follow and imitate according to the parent's actions. Parents' active role in their children's development is necessary, especially when they are under the age of five. The active role of parents is a direct effort towards children to create a home environment as the first social environment that children encounter (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Through children's observations of various behaviors displayed repeatedly in the family, interactions between father, mother, siblings, and other adults, children will learn and try to imitate and internalize as their own habits or personalities. Therefore, parents have a role as role models in children's lives. Parents' attitude and behavior to use technology will be an example for children (Weller, 2011).

Gadgets are commonly used by children to watch videos, play educational or adventure games. However, there are concerns that introducing them too early can have an impact on children. This can be both negative and positive and can lead to addiction. A wide variety of content that can be easily accessed by children can be found in gadgets. The use of gadgets has a positive impact, including facilitating the nurturing of children's creativity and intelligence (Hakim et al., 2014). However, gadgets also leave some negatives, such as the number of children who are addicted to games and experience eye radiation and even lose their sanity due to games.

Related to this problem, the tendency to use gadgets excessively and inappropriately will make a person not care about the family environment and the surrounding environment. This causes a lack of empathy in children, difficulty expressing emotions appropriately, which is an aspect of emotional intelligence (Sari et al., 2020). Strict supervision is needed in the use of gadgets by children. On the one hand, gadgets provide many benefits for children's development, but on the other hand, they also have harmful effects. The introduction of gadgets in early childhood is considered very important, because it can help stimulate imagination, improve listening skills, learn sounds and speech, and can help children's thinking, but still under parental supervision (Ogegbo & Aina, 2020). Most people think that giving children gadgets will make it easier for parents to do their work rather than being constantly interrupted by children. On the other hand, parents or teachers argue that by giving gadgets to children from an early age, children will be more familiar with technology so that they can have faster and broader insights and knowledge (Masnawati & Hariani, 2023).

In the use of gadgets, most children use gadgets more often to play. From this small thing, gadgets are given as a substitute for playmates so that children who initially enjoy playing with their friends can experience changes. Children's dependence on gadgets is caused by the long duration of playing using gadgets. Playing gadgets with a long duration and done every day can make children develop towards an antisocial person. The impact of this situation is actually to make children more individualistic, because over time they forget to communicate and interact with the surrounding environment (Lembong et al., 2015; Darmwan et al., 2018). Therefore, the role of parents is indispensable in the use of gadgets. This can be done by gradually reducing the duration of gadget use and not letting children play gadgets in front of them (Tafrihah & Utanto, 2022). In addition, environmental influences at this stage can have a long-term impact on a child's growth. It is important for parents to understand that gadget use in early childhood is not only related to the entertainment aspect, but can also form the basis of children's behavior and habits in the future. Parents' awareness of the balanced use of gadgets, the implementation of time restrictions, and the selection of age-appropriate content are key to shaping healthy behavior patterns. The importance of open communication between parents and children cannot be ignored. Parents need to open a dialog about gadget use, provide children with an understanding of the risks of addiction, and provide clear guidelines on usage limits. Innovative education can teach students about good time management, including time limits for gadget use, as well as provide useful activities outside of technology use (Saraswati et al., 2014). Educating children on the importance of time management and recognizing useful content is also an integral part of this approach (Darmawan et al., 2021).

Engaging children in family activities outside of screen time can be considered an effective solution. Playing together, talking, or doing physical activities together can help reduce children's dependence on gadgets. Parents need to create alternatives that are interesting and beneficial for children's development so that gadgets are not the only source of entertainment. With awareness and positive actions from parents, it is hoped that healthy habits in the use of technology can be formed among early childhood (Ferguson, 2008). Based on the background of the existing problems, the purpose of this paper is to find out the role of parents in preventing addiction to playing gadgets in early childhood.

RESEARCH METHODS

The type of research applied is qualitative research with a case study approach. The selection of qualitative methods was carried out to gain understanding and provide a comprehensive description of the role of parents to prevent gadget addiction in early childhood. The data sources for this research consist of two types, namely primary sources (main) obtained through data collection techniques in the form of interviews and observations, and secondary sources (supporting) obtained through documentation and official archives. Data collection methods in this research include observation and interviews. The data collected from observations, interviews, and other materials are arranged by organizing them into categories, explaining them in units, forming patterns, and making conclusions so that they can be easily understood.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The huge impact of technological developments, including gadgets that are owned and demanded by all circles, is felt by all of us, including children. Children, as the millennial generation who are literate and capable of using technology, use various gadgets to watch videos, play games, and other activities. Dependence on gadgets, both in terms of information and telecommunications, has a high appeal. When a child feels comfortable with the gadget they are using, it creates a feeling as if they have found their own world and it is difficult to escape from that comfort. Along with its development, gadgets with internet networks are now accessible to anyone, including children. They engage and enjoy being alone with their gadgets, without caring about the environment or the desire to hang out with friends.

The negative impact of gadget use at an early age, if not addressed immediately, can be fatal. Emotional or psychiatric disorders can arise as a negative impact, and prolonged screen time can cause eye problems in children, and can even lead to dependence. Parents' understanding of the signs of gadget dependence is crucial to take appropriate action. This can disturb their psychology which will hinder learning achievement (Karina et al., 2012; Yanti et al., 2013; Darmawan, 2015). This supervision places an important role on parents, emphasizing more on parental guidance to children. In addition, the role of parents as primary educators lays the foundation for other roles. This role involves a number of aspects, including:

1. As an example or exemplar: In the family environment, children first receive religious education through examples, deeds, treatment, words, and so on. Parents are the child's main role model, and the actions and words they do will be imitated and modeled by the child.
2. As mentors and coaches: Parents act as coaches and mentors who provide education to their children first before anyone else gets involved. In accordance with their function, parents must also be able to provide religious guidance to children with warnings or advice in the form of coaching, accompanied by appropriate examples from everyday life. Parents as educators must be able to guide and foster children in various ways, including training and familiarizing children to do good and have praiseworthy morals from an early age. The absence of religious education at an early age can make it difficult for children to accept religious values in adulthood.
3. In the family, the foundations of experience are laid through affection, the need for authority, and the values of obedience. Parents, as responsible for the safety and happiness of their children, can educate their children with various methods that are in accordance with religious values. The relationship between family members also affects the child's psyche, especially for children who are in the developmental stage or under the age of 18.
4. Parents as facilitators understand what they should do in the provision of education for their children in order to achieve the success of their children's goals.

How to prevent gadget dependence in children by each parent varies. Good gadget use is categorized as low, where the duration of use is less than 30 minutes/day and the intensity of use is a maximum of 2 times. High gadget use in early childhood involves a duration of more than 45 minutes of use per day and more than 3 uses of the gadget. The role of parents in preventing gadget addiction in early childhood can be described as follows:

1. Educate children about the negative impact of gadget use and always remind them of their study assignments. Parents, as the primary educators, have a great influence on children's development. Parents' personalities, attitudes and ways of life become elements of education that will be reflected in the child's developing personality. They also act as the first mentors who provide education to their children before involving other parties. Parents must be able to provide guidance with warnings, advice, and appropriate examples from everyday life. The responsibility of parents is to provide guidance and shape the child's personality with full responsibility.
2. Set a time limit for gadget use according to the agreement between children and parents. Excessive gadget use can lead to addiction, where children will feel that the gadget is their life. If gadget use is excessive and unsupervised, it can threaten the growth and development of young children who are vulnerable to negative impacts. Therefore, the right attitude must be taken by parents.
3. Be firm and disciplined to make a commitment with children to reduce gadget use. Parents must be disciplined, and when the time for using gadgets has expired, parents must firmly ask children to stop playing gadgets (Djazilan & Darmawan, 2021). The number of children who have used the internet through their respective gadgets can have both positive and negative impacts. Positive things can be felt by children when watching educational movies and still under parental supervision. However, children's ignorance can occur when they accidentally see negative content, especially in children who have high curiosity.
4. Increase your children's activities or take them outside to get to know their surroundings. Childhood is the most exciting period, where they can play and joke without restrictions, and have the opportunity to learn as much as possible. Choosing a variety of activities is important to support children's daily activities, both inside and outside the home. Encourage children to play outside to accelerate their growth and development. Children need to learn to socialize and interact with their surroundings. Therefore, it is the parents' job to teach and educate their children to socialize well, especially with their immediate environment. Parents need to get to know and mingle with the child's environment.

In this modern era, the use of gadgets has become an integral part of everyday life, including among children. Therefore, it is important for parents to understand the impact of gadget use on children and establish open communication with them. Open communication plays a crucial role in understanding children's thoughts and feelings regarding gadgets. Children, as part of the tech-savvy millennial generation, use various gadgets for various activities, such as watching videos and playing games (Ummat & Retnowati, 2022). Dependence on gadgets, both in terms of information and telecommunications, can have a significant impact on children's development (Darmawan & Mardikaningsih, 2022). Therefore, parents have an important role to guide their children in the use of gadgets.

The importance of open communication between parents and children lies in a better understanding of gadget use and its impact. This communication provides a space for children to express their experiences and feelings regarding gadgets (Schon et al., 2014). By listening attentively and without judgment, parents can create an environment where children feel comfortable to talk. Parents also need to understand that gadget use does not always have a negative impact. Therefore, in open communication, parents can talk about the positive impacts of gadget use, such as access to educational resources and development of certain skills.

In the communicative approach, parents can approach the child with open-ended questions that stimulate discussion. For example, "How do you feel about using gadgets?" or "What do you enjoy most about using gadgets?". These kinds of questions can open up a more in-depth dialog. Also, try to avoid being judgmental or condescending. This is very important. Parents need to provide support and understanding of the child's perspective. Providing positive examples of gadget use can also help children understand healthy and beneficial ways to utilize technology (Ansari & Zuber, 2010). Parents can set rules and limits regarding gadget use by involving children in the decision-making process. This discussion allows the child to feel responsible for the decision and thus more likely to comply with the agreed-upon rules.

Through open communication, parents can help children identify potential challenges or problems related to gadgets. This creates a shared awareness of the possible impacts, such as dependency or mental health disorders. In addition, open communication allows parents to provide better education about gadget use, including time limits and safe types of content. By approaching children through open communication, parents can form a healthy and trusting relationship (Darmawan et al., 2021). This is an important step to guide children towards a balanced and beneficial use of gadgets for their development.

The role of technology to support children's education has become increasingly significant (Djazilan & Hariani, 2022). Parents have a great opportunity to positively utilize technology to enrich their children's learning experience. Various educational apps and online resources can be effective tools for creating an interactive learning environment that supports children's development. One positive way that parents can use technology is through the utilization of educational apps. These apps are specifically designed to provide learning materials that match the curriculum and the developmental level of the child (Putra et al., 2022). The apps cover formal school subjects, and a variety of topics, including art, music, foreign languages, and so on. By choosing the right apps, parents can help their children to learn independently while still having fun. In addition, online resources such as e-learning platforms and educational websites provide access to a variety of lesson materials and interactive activities. Parents can seek out these resources to support their child's learning at home. For example, they can engage their children in online courses or use educational websites that offer a variety of learning materials with an engaging approach.

Social media utilization can also be considered a positive tool. Educational groups or communities on social media platforms allow parents to share experiences and resources and get advice from fellow parents (Kurniawan et al., 2022). Discussions and information exchange in such communities can be a valuable tool for improving parents' understanding of child education. It is important to create the right balance between technology use and in-person interaction. Parents need to ensure that children are not just sitting in front of a screen, but also engaging in physical activities, arts and social interactions that support their all-round development.

Parents can also utilize technology to monitor their child's educational progress. Apps or platforms that provide information on academic progress, attendance or other evaluations can help parents stay connected to their child's educational process (Hutomo et al., 2012). It is important to choose resources and apps carefully, ensuring that they are in line with the family's educational values and appropriate for the child's developmental level. Along with that, parents need to be actively involved in the use of technology with their children, providing guidance and creating positive learning experiences. By utilizing technology positively, parents can improve the quality of their children's education, stimulate their curiosity, and prepare them for future challenges (Ferri et al., 2020).

Thus, preventing gadget dependence in children requires an active role of parents through education, setting time limits, assertiveness, and increasing activities outside the home. However, more than that, open communication between parents and children is key. In an understanding dialog, parents can understand their children's thoughts and feelings regarding gadget use, opening up space to discuss the positive and negative impacts. Parents also need to realize that technology is a tool that provides great benefits if used wisely. By utilizing technology positively, parents can help children to learn, develop, and prepare for an increasingly digitally connected future. Therefore, establishing open and continuous communication with children is the key to guiding them through the challenges and risks of the technology era.

CONCLUSIONS

Findings show that gadget addiction in early childhood can have a negative impact on physical, mental and social aspects. The role of parents is vital to guide children to use technology wisely and healthily. With supervision and a positive approach, parents can help prevent the negative impact of gadget addiction on children. Educating children about screen time limits, ensuring content access is appropriate for their age and maturity level, and encouraging physical activity, creativity and social interaction outside the digital world are steps parents can take to create a healthy and balanced environment for children. Open communication and empathy are key to supporting children to deal with the challenges and pressures of the digital environment. By paying sufficient attention, understanding children's needs, and providing positive alternatives, parents can act as guardians of their children's well-being in this digital age. Therefore, parents have an important responsibility to shape their children's positive habits for using technology, with the aim of preventing screen time addiction at an early age.

Suggestions related to the role of parents to prevent early childhood gadget addiction include: (1) Parental control and supervision when children play gadgets, as well as providing education on good gadget use. This includes the choice of toys and permission to play gadgets given to children. Parents need to set limits on the duration and use of gadgets by children firmly, avoiding negative impacts on children's social development. (2) Schools should provide knowledge and information to parents about prevention and appropriate treatment for children who experience gadget addiction.

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