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DIGITAL DILEMMA: INVESTIGATING PARENTS' CONCERNS ABOUT PRESCHOOL TECHNOLOGY ADDICTION

***Annotation.** In the digital age, technology use among young children has rapidly increased, raising significant concerns among parents about its potential impact on early development. This qualitative study explores parents' perceptions, anxieties, and coping strategies regarding technology addiction in preschool-aged children. Through semi-structured interviews with parents of children aged 3 to 6, the study identifies key themes such as fears of delayed social, emotional, and cognitive development, struggles with setting screen time boundaries, and the perceived conflict between technology's educational benefits and its addictive risks. It is a qualitative study and 10 parents participated the research. Findings highlight that while parents acknowledge the value of technology for learning, they also express concerns about excessive use, the impact on social skills, and the difficulty of maintaining a balanced routine. Findings reveal that while parents acknowledge the role of digital tools in modern education, they express deep concerns over behavioral dependency, decreased physical activity, and impaired family interactions. The study highlights the need for increased parental guidance resources, balanced technology integration strategies, and support mechanisms within early childhood education frameworks to foster healthier digital habits. These insights contribute to understanding how families navigate the digital dilemma in the formative preschool years and underscore the importance of sustainable technology use for holistic child development.*

Keywords: *preschool children, technology addiction, parents' concerns, early childhood development, screen time, digital literacy, qualitative research*

Анотація. *В епоху цифрових технологій використання технологій серед дітей раннього віку стрімко зросло, що викликає значне занепокоєння у батьків щодо їхнього потенційного впливу на ранній розвиток. Це якісне дослідження досліджує сприйняття, тривоги та стратегії подолання залежності батьків від технологій у дітей дошкільного віку. За допомогою напівструктурованих інтерв'ю з батьками дітей віком від 3 до 6 років дослідження визначає ключові теми, такі як страх затримки соціального, емоційного та когнітивного розвитку; труднощі з встановленням меж часу, проведеного перед екраном; уявний конфлікт між освітніми перевагами технологій та ризиками залежності. Це якісне дослідження, в якому взяли участь 10 батьків. Результати дослідження підкреслюють, що хоча батьки визнають цінність технологій для навчання, вони також висловлюють занепокоєння щодо надмірного використання, впливу на соціальні навички та труднощів у підтримці збалансованого розпорядку дня. Результати дослідження показують, що хоча батьки визнають роль цифрових інструментів у сучасній освіті, вони висловлюють глибоке занепокоєння щодо поведінкової залежності, зниження фізичної активності та погіршення сімейної взаємодії. Дослідження підкреслює необхідність збільшення ресурсів батьківського керівництва, збалансованих стратегій інтеграції технологій та механізмів підтримки в рамках дошкільної освіти для сприяння здоровішим цифровим звичкам. Ці висновки допомагають зрозуміти, як сім'ї справляються з цифровою дилемою у формувальному дошкільному віці, та підкреслюють важливість сталого використання технологій для цілісного розвитку дитини.*

Ключові слова: *діти дошкільного віку; технологічна залежність; занепокоєння батьків; розвиток раннього дитинства; час, проведений перед екраном; цифрова грамотність; якісне дослідження.*

Introduction. The importance of technological developments and innovations in human history is undeniable. It has become almost impossible to give up the variety of

these developments and innovations and the opportunities offered by technology that make people's lives easier. Thus, technological tools (internet, smartphones, tablets, computers, etc.) have become an indispensable part of humans and a tool that takes over people's existence. This process has reached the most extreme levels and turned into addiction. The most common physical problems due to 'internet addiction', which is one of the important problems caused by long-term internet use in children, are eye disorders, negative effects of radiation, posture and skeletal structure disorders. Harman and his colleagues have shown that the social development of children who use the internet and play computer games for most of their time has significantly regressed, their self-confidence is low, their social anxiety levels and aggressive behaviors are high [13]. After areas such as entertainment, education, and health, technology has also begun to play a facilitating role in parenting. However, this help that parents receive from virtual environments also brings with it the danger of technology abuse. Virtual environments, where tasks are first delegated to keep children entertained and doing activities, are now assistants that help share responsibilities from the very beginning of parenthood [8]. Many problems such as increased time spent in front of the screen, physical inactivity, psychosocial problems, sleep disorders, disruption of nutritional habits, exposure to advertising, and increased consumption of unhealthy foods are observed in technology-addicted children. It is also supported by many studies that all these problems pose a risk in terms of obesity [11]. According to «We Are Social Digital in 2018 Turkey statistics», 54 million of the 81 million population are connected to the internet. 51 million of internet users are actively on social media, and 44 million of these users' access social media with mobile devices. The fact that social media is so effective on human life and such an influential mass communication tool is unconsciously followed by every age group. The group that will feel the most effect among these age groups is preschool children [7]. The main factor that makes the internet attractive in creating addiction is the ability to establish social connections that are not easy to establish in today's city life over the internet. The ability to establish relationships with strangers easily and without risk; the ability of people to express their thoughts and feelings freely without restraining

themselves; the ability to present the aspects of themselves that they want to show by exaggerating them; the ability to observe other people without making a sound in sharing environments on the internet [20]. For this reason, instead of internet addiction; internet addiction, pathological internet use, problematic internet use, excessive internet use, internet abuse, internet addiction disorder usage were preferred. However, as the number of studies conducted on the subject and the number of cases coming to clinics increased, it became clear that the issue could not be called just abuse, excessive or problematic use, but addiction [3]. In studies conducted on technology addiction; it has been determined that people may experience symptoms such as disproportionate and continuous use, inability to give up, inability to prevent, experiencing deprivation, inability to maintain control and experiencing negative situations due to these, especially on technological tools such as the internet, digital games, mobile phones, computers and television [5]. Although there are different studies on the prevalence of computer game addiction, computer game addiction has been associated with various psychological problems in recent years and has begun to be addressed as a psychological problem in the scientific world. While some studies have revealed the benefits of computer games as tools that improve learning; have psychomotor, physiological, cognitive, social and emotional effects; and entertain; In many studies, it is possible to talk about its negative effect [15]. It is stated that age is an important factor in children's digital game preferences. According to the results of the studies, the time children play computer games increases as they get older [14]. The use of technology in line with the individual's daily needs creates a state of digital connectedness. Daily activities and needs necessitate the use of the digitally transferred world. For this reason, the individual is classified as «digitally connected» by using digital technology [18]. In this period, which we can call the age of technology, computer and internet use have become indispensable tools of life. Another problem caused by long-term internet use is internet addiction [4]. The main purpose aimed at the rapid development of technology and its intense presence in our lives is to determine the digital games played by children aged 4-6. In addition, general information such as the reasons why children play digital games and the time they

spend in front of the screen was also obtained during the research [17]. In order for technological products to be used effectively in the field of education, both in the home environment and in the school environment, the knowledge of parents and teachers regarding the use of technology has an important place [16]. With the development of technology and its progress every passing day, smartphones occupy a very important place in our lives. Today, the rate of smartphone use is increasing. However, while a person socializes in a virtual environment on the one hand, on the other hand, they can be isolated from real life to the extent of eliminating family communication [1]. In the preschool period, effective mass media tools especially on children are the use of television and tablet-computers. The positive effects of television on children depend on the quality of the program children watch and the development of positive behavioral models by the watched heroes [12]. While some children cannot fill these empty spaces, some fill this space by using social media tools. Children's preference among the social media tools used is generally YouTube [9]. Among these addictions that have many harms, television is the first to affect children and young people in particular, causing mental and psychological problems [2]. It is known that technology, when used correctly and appropriately, has a positive effect on the development areas and success of preschool children. In this context, it is more important for what purposes it is used and what preschool teachers see technology as in preschool education than the fact that technology is used [10].

Importance of the research. This research is important in terms of revealing the causes of technology addiction in preschool children and creating a basis for early precautions that can be taken against technology addiction. Preschool period is of great importance in terms of developing early intervention in today's world where technology addiction is widespread. Therefore, this study examined technology addiction in preschool children.

Aim of the research. The purpose of this research is to determine the increasing trend of technology addiction in our country according to the opinions of teachers and parents working in primary schools and schools with kindergartens, and to determine solution suggestions for technology addiction problems encountered in preschool

education. The research addresses the question of what are the exposure of children between the ages of 4-6 to technology in preschool age, the levels of technology addiction and related factors. As the basic problem of the research.

Method. Model of the research. This study will be prepared based on the opinions of preschool parents. Qualitative research method will be used in the study. The study is in the phenomenological design of qualitative research types [19]. Qualitative research method is preferred by researchers because it allows the systematic examination of the meanings that emerge in line with the experiences and personal opinions of the people who are being researched or planned to be researched

Study group. The study group of the study consists of 1 primary school affiliated with the Ministry of National Education (MEB) in Konya City Center and including a kindergarten class, and a Private Kindergarten in Kütahya City Center, and 20 parents from these schools. In this context, in determining the study group of the study, easily accessible case sampling, which is a purposeful sampling method that allows the selection of parents of preschool children who are considered suitable for the purpose of the study, volunteer and easily accessible, was used [19].

Data collection tools. A semi-structured interview form was created by the researcher during the data collection phase. 10 questions suitable for the purpose of the study were prepared for the parents. In the study, an unstructured interview form prepared by the researcher was used to obtain data. In an unstructured interview, questions are open-ended, and in-depth data collection is possible. This type of interview is a powerful technique that helps obtain rich, valuable data. Thus, the questions to be asked to parents were determined as follows.

Findings. In this section, in line with the purpose of the research, 1 primary school affiliated with the Ministry of National Education located in Konya city center and including a kindergarten class, and 1 private kindergarten located in Kütahya city center, and 20 parents in these schools were examined through their responses to semi-structured questions regarding the examination of technology addiction in preschool children aged 4-6. In line with this purpose, the findings obtained by analyzing the interview data are included.

Of the 20 parents who participated in the research, 4 were male, 50 percent were university graduates and 50 percent were 30-35 years old, and the children of the parents determined were in the 4-6 age group.

1. Does your child have a tablet, phone, computer? If so, how old have they been?

55% of the parents said they do, 45% said they don't. All children between the ages of 3 and 5 have a tablet.

Only 1 child has had a phone since the age of 4.

V3: He/she has had a phone since he/she was about 4 years old.

V9: No, he/she hasn't.

V13: He/she has a tablet. Since he/she was 4 years old.

2. How many hours is your child allowed to watch TV or play on a tablet or phone?

While 15% of the parents said there was no time limit, 25% said they were allowed to watch for 1 hour, 40% for 2-3 hours, 10% for 4-5 hours and again 10% for 30-45 minutes.

V1: There is no specific time limit.

V4: Tablet for 2 or 3 hours.

V10: Television for 4-5 hours.

V11: Phone for 45 minutes.

V13: Maximum 1 hour a day, and that is tablets and TV in parts.

3. Do you think your child is addicted to technology?

While 45% of the parents said yes, they think he/she is addicted to technology, 55% said no, I don't think so.

V13: No, I don't think so.

V15: Yes, they are addicted to tablets.

4. What kind of precautions can be taken at home for technology addiction?

55% of the parents said that they can take precautions by directing their children to play, reading books together or doing different activities, while 35% said that they can take precautions by not letting them use technological devices, trying to keep them

away or setting a time limit, while 10% said that they will have to make them use technological devices because no precautions are enough.

V2: Playing games with the child is the best solution. It is necessary to spend quality time with them.

V16: Technology is so much a part of life that no matter how much we want it, precautions are not enough. There is no other solution than letting them spend a few hours on the phone.

V19: We turn on the TV at certain times of the day and other than that, they are only allowed to play with the tablet for 1 hour a day

5. Has children's interest in technology (phone, tablet, computer, TV) outside of class increased during the Covid-19 pandemic? Explain the reasons?

80% of parents said that children's interest in technology outside of class increased during the Covid-19 pandemic, while 20% said no, it did not increase.

V4: It has not changed. They look at it regularly outside of class hours as a 1-hour leave.

V19: It has increased. They play with tablets or phones because they are bored at home.

6. Does your child prefer their toys or technological devices to spend time?

40% of parents said that their children prefer technological devices to spend time, 30% said that they play with their toys, while 30% said that they prefer both at certain times.

V1: They prefer technological devices.

V13: Since we are constantly interested in them, they prefer to play with toys more and we play with them.

V18: They prefer both.

7. What kind of social activities do you direct your child to keep them away from technology addiction?

40% of the parents said that they play games together at home, 45% said that they go outside and go to the park and take nature walks. 15% stated that they tried to do both during the Covid-19 period and kept them away. According to the opinions, the

most preferred activities of the parents at home were blocks, puzzles, playing house, reading books and cooking and making cake in the kitchen.

V10: I direct them to play with their friends in the park and garden.

V13: Before the Covid-19 process, we used to direct them to play games such as playing ball in the garden or playing house with their friends. Now, since we are at home all the time, we direct them to blocks or puzzles at home more.

V20: We focus on activities that we can play together at home, such as puzzles, blocks or playing house.

Conclusions. This study, which examined technology addiction in preschool children, aged 4-6, tried to determine what technology addiction is in children and to determine the effect of the family on its examination. Parents took precautions by playing games with their children at home and spending quality time with them to prevent technology addiction. Some parents stated that technology is so much a part of life that even if we want to take precautions, it is not enough. A large portion of children prefer technology devices instead of playing with their toys as children easily have toys at a young age and also technological devices. Parents stated that the reason for the increase in children's technology use outside of class is that they play with tablets or phones because they are bored at home. When asked whether the socio-economic status and educational status of parents affect children's technology addiction, 90% of teachers said that it does. «Parents who are educated can understand the benefits and harms of technological devices and take precautions accordingly, but parents with low education see technological devices as entertainment tools. For example, since the family's financial situation is limited, only a telephone and a television can be found at home and not everyone has a personal phone, but when the financial situation is high, personal technological devices can be found at home, which brings with it technology addiction» He said. While the educational and economic status of families in general show that they have a great effect on children, the findings of the research show that this effect is also very important in the formation of technology addiction, but it is not the only factor, it is also affected by the environment or other factors besides the family (Karateke, 2020). Technology addiction negatively

affects children's development. They are cognitively behind their peers. They isolate themselves from the outside world in terms of social and emotional development. They have difficulty in speaking and expressing themselves in language development. In psychomotor terms, obesity and visual impairment are observed due to inactivity because they are constantly in front of technological devices.

Recommendations.

- *Parental Guidance Programs:* Develop workshops and resources to educate parents on healthy technology usage, digital literacy, and age-appropriate screen time practices for preschoolers.
- *Setting Clear Screen Time Boundaries:* Encourage families to establish consistent daily routines that limit screen exposure, favoring interactive, educational, and supervised content.
- *Modeling Positive Technology Use:* Parents should model balanced technology habits, demonstrating mindful, purposeful device usage to reinforce healthy behaviors in children.
- *Integration of Active Play and Social Activities:* Promote physical play, outdoor activities, and peer interaction to counterbalance the sedentary nature of digital engagement in young children.
- *Collaboration with Early Childhood Educators:* Strengthen collaboration between parents and preschool teachers to create unified strategies for managing technology use both at home and in educational settings.
- *Development of Alternative Educational Resources:* Encourage the production and dissemination of non-digital educational materials and activities to support cognitive and emotional development.
- *Early Intervention and Counseling Support:* Establish early intervention programs where parents concerned about signs of technology overuse can receive guidance from child development specialists.
- *Policy Recommendations for Preschool Institutions:* Advocate for clear policies within preschools regulating digital device use, emphasizing developmental appropriateness, supervision, and moderation.

- *Promotion of Family-Based Media Plans*: Recommend that families create personalized "media use plans" that reflect their values, balancing digital engagement with face-to-face interaction.

- *Ongoing Research and Monitoring*: Support continuous research into the long-term effects of technology exposure in early childhood, ensuring practices and recommendations stay evidence-based.

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