Digital Era: What Can Parents Do to Prevent Uncontrolled Screen Time in Young Children?

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Abstract

As a result of Covid-19, children's screen time has increased. This habit still occurs today after the pandemic. In fact, excessive screen time can have various negative impacts on children. This study aims to analyze the application of screen time and ways that can be done to prevent uncontrolled screen time in early childhood. This type of qualitative research uses data collection techniques using questionnaires and interviews. The data sources in this study consisted of 53 respondents from 24 different cities in Indonesia. Data were analyzed using data analysis techniques by Miles and Huberman. The study results show that several efforts can be made to prevent uncontrolled screen time in young children, namely with disciplined regulations, parental supervision, positive diversion activities, and setting screen time on digital media. Some of these methods can be used by parents to prevent uncontrolled screen time in their children.

Keywords: Digital Era, Screen Time, Young Children.

Introduction

The digital era encourages children to get used to using digital media. The amount of time spent interacting with digital media screens is known as screen time. There are various reasons parents apply screen time to children, for example, to distract children while doing household chores or working (Eichen et al., 2021). Several factors influence the pattern, intensity, and duration of young children's use of digital devices, such as the number of busy parents, the behavior of parents using digital devices, the number of siblings, parents' knowledge about the impact of using digital devices, the environmental conditions in which children grow up, and parenting support from others (Pratiwi, 2020). Meanwhile, according to WHO guidelines (2019), babies under one year should not be exposed to electronic screens. Meanwhile, children between the ages of 2 and 5 cannot look at screens for more than one hour each day. So, the duration of screen time for young children must be minimized.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, children's screen time has increased (Ozturk Eyimaya & Yalçin Irmak, 2021; Pandya & Lodha, 2021). Due to lockdown rules, children spend more time at home and reduce physical activity (Eyler et al., 2021; Shifali et al., 2021; ten Velde et al., 2021). The amount of free time that children have due to the lockdown causes the duration of

children's screen time to increase. This is of course exacerbated for countries with more extended lockdown rules (Bergmann et al., 2022). Increased screen time in children during the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a possibility that it will still occur until the post-pandemic period as it is today.

The fact about increasing screen time in early childhood is undoubtedly worrying. This is because various negative impacts can be caused by uncontrolled screen time. Research by Windiani et al. (2021) proved that screen time could cause sleep disturbances. Even if the duration of screen time reaches seven hours, it can increase depression and anxiety (Ali et al., 2021). This was reinforced by Wagner et al. (2021), who state that screen time can lead to worse mental health for some people. Another impact is that screen time can hinder language development in early childhood because direct interaction with children can create much better stimulation for language development than children's interaction with digital media (Priyoambodo & Suminar, 2021). So it can be concluded that excessive screen time can negatively impact children.

Some studies mentioned above have mentioned various negative impacts of screen time. Although there are also several studies that discuss the benefits of screen time, such as Korhonen's research (2022) and LeBlanc et al.'s research. (2017). Several other studies examined the relationship between parents and the duration of screen time in children. Konca's research (2022) states that parents and home settings play a crucial role in their children's interactions with digital technology. Halpin et al. (2021) revealed that dysfunctional parenting styles affect children's behavior problems related to screen time and the self-efficacy of parents to deal with this behavior. According to Mansor et al. (2021) the strongest predictor of parental barriers to reducing children's excessive screen time is positive parental attitudes toward screen time which may contribute to their ability to limit children's screen time. So it can be concluded that parents influence children's screen time duration.

Several previous studies have examined a lot about the negative impacts of and their relationship with the role of parents. However, there has yet to research on how to prevent uncontrolled screen time. Parents are aware of the impact and importance of limiting screen time, but preventing their children from using it is not easy, especially when studying from home. Therefore, a different approach is needed for learning from home, especially for managing the duration of screen time for preschool-age children (Susilowati et al., 2021). This research seeks to find solutions to these problems. This study aims to analyze the occurrence of uncontrolled screen time and ways to prevent uncontrolled screen time in young children. So, the results of this study can provide benefits or add references for parents who want to apply screen time to their children so that uncontrolled screen time does not occur.

Method

This type of qualitative research examines and presents descriptive data regarding ways to prevent uncontrolled screen time in early childhood. The data collection technique used in this study was written interviews via questionnaires and reinforced by direct interviews. The type of questionnaire used is an open questionnaire in which the types of questions can be answered freely by respondents who give their opinions. The questionnaire instrument in this study is shown in table 1 below.

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Table 1. Research Instruments

No	Questionnaire Questions	Answer
1	In your opinion, how many hours per day do today's children spend with digital media such as cell phones, TVs, laptops, etc.?	
2	Is it necessary to apply screen time to children? Please provide reasons.	
3	How many hours a day is ideal for children's screen time?	
4	What factors can cause screen time activities in children to be out of control?	
5	What can be done to control children so that their screen time activities are controlled?	

The data sources in this study consisted of 53 respondents from 24 different cities in Indonesia. The data in this study were analyzed using data analysis techniques Miles & Huberman (1994), which, after data collection, was followed by data reduction, data presentation, drawing conclusions, and verification.

Results Study and Discussion

The research results that the researchers obtained from the questionnaires and interviews found several efforts that could be made to prevent uncontrolled screen time in young children. After the data that the researcher collected went through the data reduction process, the researcher found four efforts that could be made, as mentioned in Figure 1 below.
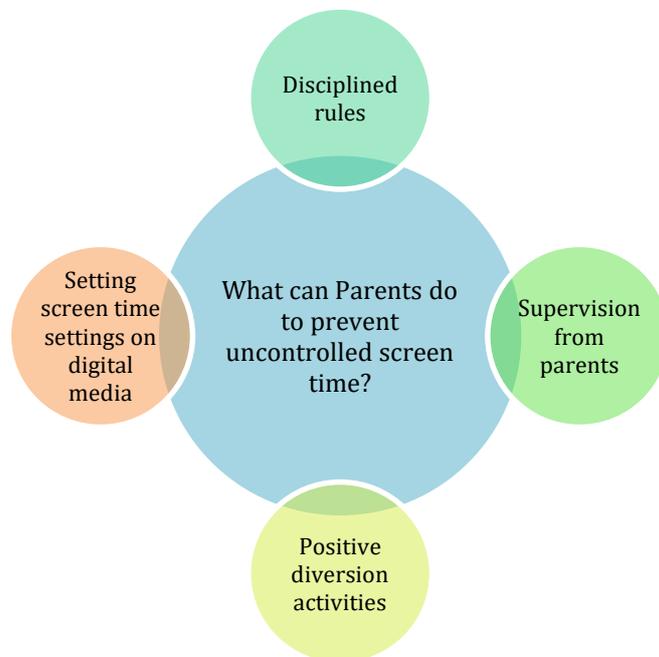

Figure 1. Measures to prevent uncontrolled screen time in young children

Figure 1 above mentions several efforts that can be made to prevent uncontrolled screen time in young children, namely with disciplined regulations, parental supervision, positive diversion activities, and setting screen time on digital media. The following is a complete discussion.

Disciplined Rules

One way to prevent uncontrolled screen time from occurring in young children is through disciplined regulations. These rules can be made and agreed upon by parents and children. Grueneisen & Tomasello's (2019) study states that only children aged eight years and over can quickly agree and comply with impartial rules to regulate their activities with adult encouragement. However, this method is worth a try to apply to young children. Because even though they are still under eight years old, children must begin to be trained to obey rules from an early age. So that children can be trained not to do everything they want, including terms of screen time.

There are various ways to implement screen time regulations for young children. The most common rules are not playing games until homework is done and paying attention to health issues such as getting enough rest and not straining the eyes (Goh et al., 2015). These regulations focus on not disrupting more important activities and avoiding negative impacts on health. In addition, parents prevent their children from the potential negative effects of digital media use by trying to enforce rules, for example, regarding time spent with media or content restrictions (Eichen et al., 2021). Parents made these regulations to avoid the negative effects of using digital media. According to Hertinjung et al. (2021), parents must be counseled so they can apply consistent rules regarding the use of gadgets.

The rules given to young children must be obeyed. One way to be done so that children are disciplined in obeying the rules is by giving rewards and punishments. In an interview, one of the respondents said:

> "The way to control children so that their screen time activities are controlled is by making a play schedule and giving rewards or punishment on their schedule" (WW, interview, 11 November 2022)

Giving rewards and punishments can further motivate children to comply with the rules made. This method is supported by Arinalhaq & Eliza (2022), who states that with rewards and punishments, children can better control their emotions and obey the rules given by the teacher or parents. So this method has proven to be effective in encouraging children to comply with the rules to regulate their screen time activities.

Parental Supervision

The following way that can be done to prevent uncontrolled screen time from occurring in young children is with parental supervision. Most of the time, children spend every day at home with their parents. Today's children are increasingly attached and spend much time with digital devices. Meanwhile, the impact can be positive or negative. Parents cannot keep children away from digital media. The thing they can do is set rules and supervise their use to get positive effects from digital media (Novianti & Maria, 2019). So the supervision of parents will help children avoid negative impacts.

There are various forms of parental supervision. Mazdalifah & Moulita (2021) revealed that most parents do passive supervision, and a few do active supervision. Passive supervision limits the child's time using the media and monitors what sites the child visits. While active supervision, such as teaching and supervising children using digital media, especially the internet, is another effective way. Alamiyah et al. (2021) revealed that before the pandemic,

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the supervision model was mainly carried out with technical restrictions regarding time restrictions, content access, application choices, and the number of data packages. However, during a pandemic, the mentoring model was carried out with active mediation through discussion and critical thinking, active with devices, close monitoring, and monitoring of post-online applications and activity. Of course, parents should prioritize this active supervision because, after the pandemic, children are used to using digital media.

Positive Diversion Activities

Another way that can be done to prevent uncontrolled screen time from occurring in young children is through positive diversion activities. Children spend much time with digital media due to a lack of physical activity. Especially during the lockdown during the pandemic, children spent more time at home, and their physical activity decreased (Eyler et al., 2021; Shifali et al., 2021; ten Velde et al., 2021). This is still a child's habit even now after the pandemic. Based on the research data obtained from the questionnaire, children today spend more than 5 hours a day using digital media, exceeding WHO standards. So it is necessary to have positive and active diversion activities so that children do not continue to play with digital media. In an interview, a respondent revealed several examples of activities that could be used as distractions for children.

> "Providing play activities and accompanying play, giving children opportunities to interact with peers, involving children in doing homework such as sweeping, tidying up items and toys, etc." (TS, interview, 10 November 2022)

From the results of these interviews, several types of activities can be taken that children can do, such as playing with parents, interacting with friends, or doing homework.

Efforts through positive diversion activities are also supported by the research of Baharun & Finori (2019), which mentions an alternative approach to educating children in this digital technology era, namely by optimizing positive activities, in addition to collaborating technological advances with children's education, literacy of information technology, limiting the time to use digital technology products, selectively choosing media for children, and monitoring the environment, both in cyberspace and around it. The method of positive diversion activities is very effective in supporting efforts to prevent uncontrolled screen time in young children.

Screen Time Settings on Digital Media

Another way that can be done to prevent uncontrolled screen time from occurring in young children is by setting screen time on digital media. These settings can be with the use of the application. For example, parental control applications can help select, limit, and supervise children's smartphone use (Hermawan, 2019). The application allows parents to manage their child's smartphone playing activities according to family needs. The application used for tracking screen time on Android and iOS digital media has proven valid for tracking (Kristensen et al., 2022). It is very important to use multilevel measures to prevent unhealthy screen time and other behaviors that can affect the health and well-being of young children (Sultana et al., 2021) so that children can avoid the negative effects of screen time on digital media.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that several efforts can be made to prevent uncontrolled screen time in young children. First, parents provide disciplined rules for children regarding the

rules for screen time activities. Second, active supervision from parents so that children obey the rules that have been set. Third, positive diversion activities that children can do every day. Fourth, setting screen time on digital media using an application. Some of these methods can be used by parents who want to apply screen time to their children but want to avoid the negative effects of uncontrolled screen time. The researcher's suggestion for further research is to increase the number of data sources to produce more varied and effective methods.

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