

THE IMPACT OF GADGETS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD SPEECH DEVELOPMENT

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Annotation

This article examines the impact of digital gadgets on speech development in early childhood. In recent years, devices such as smartphones, tablets, computers, and televisions have become widely used even among very young children. While these technologies provide access to educational content and entertainment, excessive and uncontrolled use may negatively affect children's language acquisition. The article analyzes how gadget use influences vocabulary development, communication skills, and interaction between children and adults. Special attention is given to the role of social communication in language development and the risks associated with reduced verbal interaction caused by prolonged screen time. The study also highlights the importance of parental supervision and balanced use of digital technologies. The findings suggest that although gadgets can support learning when used appropriately, direct communication, storytelling, reading, and interactive play remain the most effective ways to support speech development in early childhood.

Keywords: early childhood, speech development, gadgets, digital technology, language acquisition, screen time, child communication, educational technology

In the modern digital era, gadgets such as smartphones, tablets, computers, and televisions have become an integral part of everyday life. These technological devices are widely used not only by adults but also by young children. As a result, children are exposed to digital media from a very early age. While gadgets provide numerous educational and entertainment opportunities, their increasing use among

young children has raised concerns among educators, psychologists, and speech development specialists. One of the most discussed issues is the impact of gadgets on early childhood speech and language development. Early childhood is considered the most critical period for language acquisition, as children actively learn to communicate, express thoughts, and interact with others. Therefore, understanding how gadgets influence speech development during this important stage is essential for parents, teachers, and researchers.

Speech development in early childhood is closely connected with social interaction and communication. Children learn language primarily through communication with adults and peers. During conversations, they acquire vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and communication skills. Psychologists and linguists emphasize that face-to-face interaction plays a key role in the development of language abilities. When parents talk, read, and play with their children, they create an environment that stimulates speech development. However, the growing presence of gadgets has changed the traditional patterns of communication within families. In many cases, children spend significant amounts of time interacting with screens rather than communicating with people. Several studies indicate that excessive gadget use may negatively affect speech development in young children. One of the primary concerns is the reduction of verbal interaction between children and adults. When children spend long periods watching videos or playing digital games, opportunities for real-life communication decrease. As a result, children may have fewer chances to practice speaking, listening, and understanding language. This can lead to delayed speech development, limited vocabulary, and difficulties in forming sentences. In addition, passive consumption of digital content does not always encourage active language use, which is essential for learning how to communicate effectively.

Another important factor is the quality of the content that children are exposed to through gadgets. Not all digital content is educational or beneficial for language development. Some programs and applications are designed mainly for entertainment and may not provide meaningful linguistic input. Rapid scene

changes, loud sounds, and visual effects may capture children's attention but do not necessarily support cognitive and linguistic growth. Furthermore, when children watch content in a language that is different from their native language, it may create confusion in pronunciation and vocabulary acquisition.

Despite these concerns, gadgets are not always harmful if used appropriately and under adult supervision. Many educational applications and programs are specifically designed to support children's learning and language development. Interactive educational games, digital storybooks, and language learning applications can introduce new words, sounds, and concepts. These tools may help children expand their vocabulary and improve their listening skills. Moreover, when parents participate in digital activities together with their children, gadgets can become a tool for shared learning and communication. For example, parents can discuss the content of a video, ask questions, and encourage children to express their opinions. Researchers emphasize that the impact of gadgets largely depends on how and how much they are used. Moderate and purposeful use of digital devices may provide educational benefits, while excessive and unsupervised use can create developmental challenges. International health organizations recommend limiting screen time for young children. For instance, many experts suggest that children under the age of two should have minimal exposure to digital screens, while preschool children should have limited and supervised screen time. These recommendations are based on the understanding that direct human interaction remains the most effective way for children to develop language and communication skills.

Another significant issue related to gadget use is the reduction of imaginative and social play. Traditional play activities such as storytelling, role-playing, and interactive games play an important role in language development. Through these activities, children practice using language in different contexts, learn to express emotions, and develop communication strategies. When gadgets replace these interactive experiences, children may lose opportunities to develop important linguistic and social abilities. In addition, excessive screen time may affect children's

attention span and concentration, which are also important for effective communication and learning. Parents and educators play a crucial role in guiding children's interaction with digital technology. It is important for adults to create a balanced environment where technology supports rather than replaces communication and social interaction. Parents should encourage children to engage in conversations, read books, tell stories, and participate in interactive activities. These experiences stimulate language development and strengthen the bond between children and adults. Furthermore, selecting high-quality educational digital content and setting clear time limits can help ensure that gadgets are used in a constructive and beneficial way.

Educational institutions also have a responsibility to raise awareness about the influence of digital technology on child development. Teachers and specialists can provide guidance to parents about effective strategies for managing children's screen time. Workshops, training sessions, and informational programs can help families understand the potential risks and benefits of gadget use. In addition, researchers should continue to investigate the long-term effects of digital technology on language and cognitive development in children. In conclusion, gadgets have become an unavoidable part of modern childhood, and their influence on speech development cannot be ignored. While digital devices offer educational opportunities, excessive and uncontrolled use may negatively affect children's language development by reducing real-life communication and interaction. Early childhood is a sensitive period for language acquisition, and children need rich verbal environments to develop strong communication skills. Therefore, it is essential for parents, educators, and society to ensure a balanced approach to technology use. When gadgets are used wisely, combined with active parental involvement and meaningful social interaction, they can become supportive tools rather than obstacles in the development of children's speech and language abilities.

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