

## **A Study on the Perception of Preliminary Early Childhood Teachers on Young Children's Addiction to Media and its Alternatives**

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### **Abstract**

*This study aims to investigate preliminary early childhood teachers' recognition of children's addiction to media and alternative solutions. The research subjects were 33 students (preliminary early childhood teachers) in an early childhood education institute. The data collected were coded according to the content from group interview sessions and classified by concepts and topics. The results suggest that parents' inappropriate child-rearing was mostly held responsible for children's addiction to media, which is harmful for their physical development and has not been given necessary attention by society.*

*Secondly, the participants suggested social support, namely that parents can get education and treatment services about incorrect child-rearing attitudes. Therefore, to prevent children's media addiction and to make better educational use of media, early childhood education institutions, counseling centers, and local social service centers have to provide guidebooks on appropriate media education, instructions for parenting, or training opportunities for improving the parent-child relationship, which young children and parents should easily be able to benefit from. Also, experts need to carry out a detailed plan for this process.*

**Keywords:** *young children, media, addiction, alternative*

### **1. Introduction**

Internet access has been widely available for Koreans, the most in the world (Korea Internet Information Center, 2001), and 99% of teenagers are known to have access to the Internet (Korea Internet & Security Agency, 2011). This phenomenon has increased young children's computer usage and Internet experience. Through smartphones and social networking services, the Internet is being used as a key medium of experiencing and creating new cultures as well as study, communication, entertainment, and shopping tools (Young Hwan Lee, Hwa Sook Lee, 2013). Moreover, broad usage of Internet at homes and a flourishing Internet industry of early childhood education have increased the number of online education tools for young children and their usage (Min Kyun Kwan, 2003). Also, children are beginning to use computers at younger ages; 51.4% of 3- to 5-year-old children had experience of using computer (Ministry of Information and Communication, 2006; Kyung Ja Cho, 2002). Media are closely related with children's environment, and educational environments utilizing television, computer, and Internet are well established. The fact that only 40.4% of early childhood teachers are using the Internet to educate children (Jong Yeon Kim, 2002) reflects their worries of negative media aspects.

Putting aside pros and cons of media-based education, multimedia education with digital cameras and smartphones is being used to hand out study materials and for instructional

media. Internet instructional media could employ many tools such as sound, animation, and video clips, which increases children's interests and are being positively received by parents (Kyung Woo Lee, 1998). Education using the Internet through computers or smartphones allows learners to self-explore, promotes self-directed and/or cooperative learning, and maximizes the effects of audio-visual learning (Min Kyun Kwan, 2003). The perception of this media-based education can affect the overall environment of early childhood education including teaching-learning contents, methods, and evaluation. Therefore, in early childhood education, media literacy, critical acceptance for media, and ability to creatively use media are being emphasized (Eun Jin Kang, Eun Ja Hyun, 2004; Ah Mi Kim, 2009). Early childhood teachers' application of media could be determined by its suitability, the circumstances of institutes, or personal preference. As children are increasingly exposed to media at home, educational institutions, or other environment, the educational approach for media is becoming more important.

However, there are clear negative aspects of media such as violence and social prejudice, which can affect children's sense of values as well as their learning abilities and development (Sun Woo Kim, 2002; Brabant & Mooney, 1999). The harmful side-effect called Internet addiction (Goldberg, 1996) is one that must be dealt with through education. Children who suffer ignorance, rejection, or isolation from their parents or primary carers are prone to be lost in the Internet (Jae Hong Jang, 2004). They seek emotional support and express hidden feelings through the Internet, which could lead to addiction (Young Hwan Lee, Hwa Suk Lee, 2013). Children can go through depression, aggressiveness, and stress, even become ill from irregular life styles, and have difficulty in learning and with peer relationships. Moreover, children can be exposed to harmful information such as sexually inappropriate materials or games, which are not suitable for education.

While the rate of youth Internet addiction has decreased recently, that of elementary school children has seen an increase (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, 2010). The perception and involvement of parents, primary carers, and teachers play an important role in protecting these young children from addiction. It's been emphasized that children find interests in field experience or other outdoor activities to be protected or cured from Internet addiction (National Information Society Agency's Internet Addiction Center, 2012). However, there is not enough research covering the effects of media on children's development and learning (Min Jung Kim, Eun Joo Park, Gap Sun Kim, 2007) or the effects of guidance, management, and preventive programs based on specific rationale.

So far, the advancement and daily application of media have been helpful in many ways, but excessive and abusive use also have caused social problems. One of the most significant problematic behaviors of young children is addiction to smartphones and games. The environment surrounding children is more and more involved with media, which calls for educational guidance for children to prevent related problems. Therefore, it's important to review experiences of and solutions for children who are exposed to media, and to discuss efforts and the educational approach that are needed for preliminary early childhood education teachers.

In this study, children's addiction to media and related problems are discussed and preliminary teachers' perceptions of their alternatives are explored and analyzed. Considering appropriate attributes for childhood, this effort is expected to provide practical use for growth and development of children by facilitating the right educational approach. Accordingly, the research topics are set as follows.

1. What is the perception of preliminary early education teachers on children's addiction to media?

2. What is the perception of preliminary early education teachers on educational alternatives for children's addiction to media?

## **2. Research Method**

### **2.1. Research Participant**

The participants of this research are junior and senior students in the early childhood education department of universities J and C. Group discussion was carried out. The group was comprised of 14 juniors and 19 seniors; 7 male and 24 female students.

### **2.2. Research Procedure**

Interviews with preliminary teachers were carried out to investigate their perception of children's addiction to media and its alternatives and to explore an educational approach. Interviews were performed in a casual manner (Young Chun Kim, 2012) to easily understand the participants' perspective, daily lives, consciousness, subjectivity, and emotion, which allowed the participants to interact, clarify others' viewpoints, and clearly grasp their own perspective (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In this study, four group interview sessions were carried out from March 8-23, 2013. Firstly, group discussion between researchers and preliminary teachers was held to talk and set the agenda. Then, the opinions from preliminary teachers were documented according to groups, and comments were recorded with their consent. Preliminary teachers freely formed small groups of 4-5 people on their own, and sub-topics were selected on media addiction. The duration of discussions and interviews on the sub-topics were 40 minutes to an hour. The comments of the participants were collected via voice-recording with consent, and the process was carried out in a non-structured manner.

### **2.3. Data Analysis**

To analyze the preliminary teachers' perception on children's media addiction and its alternatives, the data collected were documented, reviewed, and interpreted within 4-5 days after group interviews. The comments from group interviews were coded and classified according to terms and subjects.

## **3. Results and Interpretation**

### **3.1. Perception of Preliminary Teachers on Media Addiction**

The perception of preliminary teachers on media addiction can be divided into three categories. Firstly, inappropriate parenting was suggested as a cause of media addiction, the detail of which follows.

Young children these days have easy access to smartphones and these smartphones are so readily given to children when they cry or act out. There are other, better ways to deal with children acting out but parents are just resorting to smartphones to calm them down. Also, smartphones show as much inappropriate material to children as television or the Internet, and children are so impressionable that these materials can have a bad impact on them (group interview, 2012.3.16)

We can easily see parents or primary carers giving smartphones to their children to cope with their demands. This might expose children to electromagnetic waves and cause their developing eye-sight to fail as they try to look closer at small screens.

Parents' using too much smartphones or computers might cut off interaction with their children. First, conversation between them decreases. Physical activity also decreases, as children don't exercise as much as they need to. Also, unless corrected, children keep the crouched posture while looking into the screens, which might cause spinal distortion, or eye-sight failure (group interview, 2012.3.16)

Through watching television with parents, children can experience various useful, fun programs, but without parents' guidance, they might be exposed to aggressive behavior or bad languages, which could be manifested in their daily lives. Parenting, also, doesn't seem consistent. That is, parents watch television so much that they have less or no time to speak or play with their children (group interview, 2012.3.26).

Media addiction might be caused by parents' excessive use of media. Parents' Internet shopping or game addiction can cut off relationships with their children. And it must be checked to see if children are getting enough attention from their parents and learning social skills from parents or teachers. Teachers also have to provide personal guidance at home or at kindergarten. (group interview, 2012.3.26)

Secondly, media addiction was presented as a bad influence on children's development. Irregular life patterns, language development challenge, concentration difficulty, lack of social skills, and many problematic behaviors were pointed out. The details are as follows.

Addiction to computer games could cause many problems for children. They might suffer challenges of physical development like eye-sight failure, dry eye syndrome, and demonstrate problematic behaviors such as aggressiveness from confusing the virtual world with the real world. (group interview. 2013.3.16)

Immoderate television watching induces passive thinking, and they learn inappropriate behaviors and emotion from violent and sexual TV shows to which they are vulnerably exposed. (group interviews. 2012.3.16)

Children also get various information from media and if they are not aware of the contents or features of those media, they sometimes feel left out from conversation with peers. Media could stimulate children's interests; however, it could also deprive them time from thinking and even deteriorate their ability to concentrate (group interview. 2012.3.26).

Computers are closely involved in our daily lives and could provide convenience for educating children. However, once children become familiar with computers, they use them excessively and also in a fixed posture for a long time, acquire bad life habits, and avoid interaction with others. (group interview. 2012.3.26)

Using the Internet could provide us with various useful materials for education, and useful web-sites allow children to have instant interaction. However, children could easily be exposed to harmful web-sites. Being impressionable as they are, children could develop inappropriate stimulation and interests, which could lead to use of bad language and problematic behavior. (group interview. 2012.3.26)

Once children are easily exposed to games and even addicted to them, they don't have inter-personal contact and lack social skills. Also, they lose regular life patterns, can't be taught important skills like time management, proper eating habits, and even suffer malnutrition (group interview. 2012.3.26)

Lastly, society's negligence was pointed out as a cause of media addiction. It didn't predict the impact of media or prepare a safeguard as a use of media such as the Internet and smartphones become widespread. The details are as follows.

Smartphones can engage in children's interests and concentration. If educational applications are wisely used with appropriate stimulation and management, they can provide advantageous audio-visual effects and be helpful for acquiring knowledge and information. However, children could keep away from book reading and other activities, or could easily

have access to harmful web-sites. Also, children with the latest smartphones could form their own bond while others without them could feel left out. (group interview, 2012.3.16)

While the Internet has become widely available, society seems ignorant to the degree of harm or solutions for problems for children. In this regard, there must be educational contents and social support programs. Society is responsible for developing and distributing treatment programs for media addiction and putting in place preventive measures (group interview, 2012.3.26)

### 3.2. Solution for Media Addiction and the Perception of Preliminary Early Childhood Teachers for Educational approach

Two potential solutions for media addiction and an educational approach to remedy such an addiction exist. First is appropriate intervention and guidance of parents and teachers. They need to be taught appropriate media use through modeling, and also need to be offered an educational environment where they can avoid being addicted to media by getting involved with other activities. The details are as follows.

When children use media, there needs to be an appropriate intervention by parents and teachers. By watching TV together, parents and teachers could teach children right habits through modeling, and have an opportunity to share thoughts on the shows. (group interview, 2012.3.16)

It seems better to gradually reduce the amount of time using media or give conditional approval than to suddenly cut off all media including computer, television, and smartphones. Also, parents and teachers' using media around children could encourage them to follow so they must refrain from using them, provide other kinds of activities to replace media, and find integrative activities to use media. (group interview, 2012.3.16)

Children need to be guided to use media for mainly educational purposes and protected from harmful environments. They could benefit from the educational environment where they learn and understand from discussing the pros and cons of media. (group interview, 2012.3.26)

It's important to check and arrange time to use media with children, help them learn good habits, and increase the amount of conversation through interacting with parents, teachers, and peers. And it's also important to make a detailed plan for this time together with children, and have them to try to change their behavior on their own so that they can control themselves without the help of adults and find other interests. (group interview, 2012.3.26)

Parents' ignorance is another reason children become exposed and addicted to media. If parents just let children play games because they have to go to work, then there must be some alternatives for children. First, it's important for parents to have interests in their children and to adjust their schedule to secure time for conversation and play. In this way, they could save money by preventing disorders, problematic behaviors, decrease in learning ability, which would've cost? them more money. (group interview, 2012.3.26)

Next, society's responsibility for media addiction was mentioned. They called for social support for right media usage and educational approach. There must be experts and appropriate media education programs so children do not fall into media addiction. The details are as follows.

Children with various degree of addiction to computers or smartphones should be offered an educational environment where they can seek help from experts as well as parents or teachers. Disabilities should be dealt with by an adequate program which involves experts' treatment and takes place at easily accessible locations so that children can get needed medical service and rehabilitation. (group interview, 2012.3.16)

Society is to blame for not being able to predict and prepare for media addiction. Socio-cultural insensitivity to safety issues is a big problem. Society should publicly inform parents

and teachers on preventive measures and alternatives; offer materials for direct education service; and recruit more experts like early childhood counselors, social service workers, and play therapists. (group interview, 2012.3.26)

We expect society to change and we adjust ourselves to it. Proliferation of media has given us many benefits but caused many problems like no conversation with family, conflicts derived from media, and media addiction. These social problems are not just for family to deal with; it's also society's responsibility to offer educational, preventive support. For example, it's urgent for community and government to initiate and provide various programs to restore the functional family. (group interview, 2012.3.26)

So far, the perception of preliminary early childhood teachers is that both family and society take responsibility; the functional family and society should be restored by various educational programs; and children will change and develop with these efforts.

#### **4. Discussion and Suggestions**

This study explored the perception of preliminary early childhood teachers on children's addiction to media and its alternatives. Parents, teachers, and society were blamed for children's media addiction. Firstly, parents and teachers were suggested to change their perception and attitude, and society to offer social support for preventing and treating this addiction. With regard to the previous study, the results can be discussed as follows.

Firstly, preliminary early childhood teachers perceived bad parenting at home as the cause of media addiction and pointed out media's bad influence on children and society's responsibility for alternatives. As indicated by many studies which looked into the cause of media addiction (Jeong Won Kang, Soo Jin Jang, Seung Ohk Kim, 2011; Young Hwan Lee, Hwa Sook Lee, 2013; Jae Hong Jang, 2004; Brabant & Mooney, 1999), to prevent children's media addiction, appropriate attitudes and a proper educational approach for parents and teachers should be explored. In Gu Jong You (2011) and Joo Hee Moon's (2011) studies, smartphones and tablet PCs were seen as an effective early childhood educational media that can facilitate child-centered activities and offer more lifelike features including sound effects than paper books do. Proper use of smart learning where children can manipulate and interact with book contents (Beal & Ricci, 2002) is recommended. However, apps that children can use to practice drawing, play children's songs, or watch educational video clips on YouTube are being used immoderately. A more troublesome issue is that although parents worry about their children's media addiction, they don't control children's media use in an orderly fashion or intervene in the process of children being exposed to media. It was pointed out that children's online education websites could provide various functions such as offering information, social networking, or shopping, but parents must be involved in activity guidance and learning management (Min Kyoon Kwan, 2003). Young children move their bodies to learn how to speak and learn a language through conversation; media, however, reduce this kind of interaction. For children's physical development, it's not recommended for children under two years of age to use media (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2012). However, lack of parental involvement and supervision is problematic. Since causes of children's Internet addiction include intimacy at home, employment status of parents, and Internet dependency (Jung Won Kang, Soo Jin Jang, Seung Ohk Kim, 2011), parents need to change their perception and attitude, for which society should provide support.

Secondly, in exploring the alternatives for children's media addiction, active change in parenting was the most called for. This is validated by studies that demonstrated the direct influence of parenting among many other factors on children's development (Nam Sook Sohn, Sook Hee Lee, 2008; Jong Wook Lee, Han Hee Choi, Byung Ki Park, 2012; Ho Chan Lim,

2008). Parents' values and attitudes of childcare have important influence on young children's development. In the age of low fertility rate, parenting values have gone through some changes like decrease in boy preference, increase in children's status at home, engaging in various educational approaches, cultural change in pregnancy and childbirth, and more equal role of child rearing (Jung Eun Nam, Jung Hee Jung, 2012), all of which have affected parents' attitudes toward child rearing. It's important to adapt to this social change and allow more interaction between parents and children, and reduce the amount of time they are exposed to media. Also, considering the fact that children's ability to understand media is associated with the increase in information process related with thinking ability and memory (Strasburger & Wilson, 2006), the duration and contents of children's media use need to be controlled. For this, detailed approaches have to be educated and informed. Early childhood teachers, social service workers, childhood development experts, early childhood education institutions, and government should intervene in the process of offering various organized services like guidebooks, parenting education, and parent-child relationship programs.

Social factors should be considered when preventing children's media addiction. Considering the fact that children can learn and develop in the context of surrounding environment, government and society should take the responsibility to provide support for this matter with detailed programs. Early childhood teachers and parents both demanded training programs for media education (Yong Sook Kim, Young Sik Kang, 2011). Children's media addiction can be cured and prevented if children and parents have access to media education from media, early childhood education institutions, counseling centers, or local social service centers and detailed programs are run by experts.

Thus far, the importance of support from parents, teachers, and society for treating and preventing children's media addiction which could cause many social problems has been examined. Accordingly, education for treating and preventing children's media addiction is emphatically important. That is, various programs that can help children to use media appropriately and overcome addiction on their own must be developed and put in place in the field. Furthermore, detailed plans by experts to prevent media addiction should be explored.

Based on these results, some topics for follow-up research can be suggested. Firstly, this study examined the perception of preliminary early childhood teachers and demonstrated possible educational approaches. Here, parents' influence on children was proven to be the most significant, which entails education for parenting guidance. This means that parents' specific demands for programs to prevent and treat children's media addiction should be examined. Secondly, preliminary early childhood teachers in this study emphasized the society's responsibility on children's media addiction. Looking at solutions and the effectiveness of research is required. Lastly, children's media education involves various factors that have complex effects and could play inter mediate roles. So later research should review how these factors work directly and indirectly in children's media education, and incorporate this into the media education programs.

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