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From Screen to Move: Parental Narratives of Engaging Children in Physical Activity to Limit Screen Exposure

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Abstract: *In the digital age, increased screen time among children has become a major concern affecting their overall development. Excessive screen exposure negatively impacts physical activity levels, reduces social interactions with the environment, and poses various health and psychological risks. This study explores parental strategies for redirecting children's attention from screens to physical activities. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected from 10 parent-child pairs (children aged 4-6 years) through interviews, observational studies, and documentation. The findings identified several effective parental strategies: direct engagement through shared play activities, creating supportive home environments with appropriate facilities, and facilitating peer social interactions that successfully reduce children's dependence on digital devices. While online gaming presents significant challenges, the results demonstrate that children's interest in physical activities can be maintained over screen-based entertainment through consistent parental intervention. This research provides valuable insights into parental strategies focusing on direct interaction and home-based play environments to minimize screen exposure in early childhood.*

Keywords*: screen time reduction, physical activity promotion, early childhood development, parental strategies*

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INTRODUCTION

In this digital era, screen exposure or time spent by children interacting with devices such as gadgets, tablets, television, or playing video games (Uyun 2023; McArthur et al. 2022; Angtoni and Adjie 2022; Pradana 2022; Putri, M.A. et al. 2021) has become an issue of increasing concern. (Liu et al., 2023; Outcomes, 2019) . Screen exposure can affect children's physical activity due to observing the screen, this happens because young children should be active in playing so that children's physical activity is stimulated and trained, whereas if children with prolonged screen exposure with a monotonous position in one movement will delay the development of physical activity in children (Madigan et al., 2019) . With this rapid increase in technology, children are more interested in spending their time playing gadgets than playing with their peers, this causes children to do less

physical activity, because they prefer to play gadgets in one position (Burhaein, 2017; Cendekia et al., 2021) . Children's direct interaction with peers is very important for their physical development because it provides opportunities to move, do activities, and practice various motor skills.

The lack of understanding and assistance from parents has a negative impact on children's health and productivity, resulting in screen exposure (Simanjuntak 2023; Jannah et al. 2023) . Through current technological developments, early childhood born after 2010 is the Alpha generation, where this generation is very familiar with digital technology. The development of the times is accelerating in all respects and cannot be separated from education and technology. The Industrial Revolution 4.0 emphasizes that today's technology cannot be separated from everyday life because the rapid development of technology has an impact on society. With the existence of technology, it changes the learning methods and processes (Wahid et al. 2023; Ramdhan et al. 2024; Resly 2018; Utari et al. 2019) . The presence of technology has brought significant changes in learning methods and processes. These changes cover various aspects, ranging from the way the material is delivered, the interaction between teachers and learners, to access to learning resources. Current technology can also facilitate and accelerate various human activities such as for communication, transportation, work and shopping. The use of excessive screen exposure in early childhood can have a negative impact on various aspects of their development, especially on physical activity. There are negative impacts when children have excessive screen exposure, which can cause children to not care about the surrounding environment and make children reluctant to do moving activities (Faizah et al. 2022; Jannah et al. 2023; Aldimasi et al. 2018) . High screen exposure has a negative impact on children's social interactions with peers. Interactions that should encourage physical activity through shared games and sports are reduced, so children exposed to excessive screens miss important opportunities to socialize and be active (Simanjuntak, 2023).

Physical activity is any body movement that is produced by skeletal muscles and requires energy expenditure. It includes a wide range of activities, from everyday activities to structured sports. Physical activity is very important for children as it provides a range of benefits that support their physical health, mental health and social development. Physical activity is also important for overall developmental growth in children. Optimizing the mastery of skills and attitudes that can lead to healthier behaviors in life (Fikrawan, 2015; Stork & Sanders, 2008). Limited physical activity can lead to health problems such as obesity, posture disorders, and suboptimal physical development. Children who sit more and stare at screens often move less, which can affect their muscle and bone strength (Suryoadji & Nugraha, 2021). Physical activity is also important to improve children's concentration and focus. If screen exposure is not balanced with sufficient physical activity, children risk experiencing restlessness and difficulty concentrating, which can negatively impact their learning activities (Mulyana et al., 2024).

Physical activity is important for the development of children's gross and fine motor skills, such as balance, coordination and body control. Lack of time to move can hinder the development of these skills (Arifah et al., 2023) . Physical activity has a positive impact on children's gross motor skills because it involves large body movements, such as walking, running, jumping and climbing. Physical activities such as playing ball, running, or swimming help children to learn to coordinate movements between limbs (hands, feet, head) in order to move more effectively (Setyawan et al. 2018; Saripudin 2019; Arifiyanti et al. 2019) .

Physical activity also has a positive impact on children's fine motor skills because fine motor skills involve finer movements, such as writing, drawing, and buttoning clothes. Physical activities that involve hand and finger movements, such as playing puzzles, assembling small objects, or playing musical instruments, help children to improve eye-hand coordination and improve concentration (Arief Darmawan & Amir Maulana, 2019; Farida Mayar, 2021; Galuh & Nurjanah, 2021). This research specifically focuses on the strategies and efforts implemented by parents in shifting early childhood screen exposure towards physical activity. This is important to identify effective practices that can minimize the negative impact of screen exposure on children's physical activity.

Previous research shows the influence of screen exposure in early childhood. According to (Faizah et al. 2022). Screen exposure often takes away children's playtime as well as productivity. In addition, the impact is also on limiting children to actively interact with other people or the surrounding environment. In addition, (Simanjuntak, 2023). explains that screen exposure increases the duration of screen exposure in children can cause various behavioral problems in children. Research (Aprilia & Thaib, 2024). revealed that a negative correlation was found between screen exposure and early childhood development. Research (Kakon et al., 2025) shows that lack of supervision of screen time has a negative impact on children's health. Therefore, the role of parents is crucial in developing effective guidelines for managing children's screen use. Research (Jourdren et al., 2023) shows overexposure to screens impairs children's focus, so their use needs to be carefully limited, although there are other factors at play. Research (Zhang et al., 2022) found a positive association between recommended screen exposure and intellectual ability and language development, while most other screen exposure durations showed no significant association. Research (Sasqiadisha, 2024) Limiting children's screen time by familiarizing children with play time so that children understand the maximum duration of screen time by limiting it with a time agreement and using an alarm.

Based on the results of previous research, it does not focus on screen exposure to children's physical activity but on cultural literacy, behavior, and language. While this research offers about Parental Narratives About Involving Children in Physical Activity to Limit Screen Exposure. This strategy is focused on Parental Narratives About Involving Children in Physical Activity to Limit Screen Exposure. This is the gap to conduct new research that focuses on Parental Narratives about Involving Children in Physical Activity to Limit Screen Exposure. Therefore, researchers feel it is important to research related to Parental Narratives About Involving Children In Physical Activity To Limit Screen Exposure, and researchers will provide more relevant and focused information on Parental Narratives About Involving Children In Physical Activity To Limit Screen Exposure so that it can provide different information from previous studies.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses descriptive qualitative methods with data collection through observation, interviews and documentation. Qualitative research is a type of research whose findings are not obtained through statistical procedures or other forms of calculation and aims to reveal symptoms in a holistic-contextual manner through data collection from natural settings by utilizing the researcher as the key instrument. Qualitative research is descriptive and tends to use analysis with an inductive approach.

Process and meaning based on the subject are more emphasized in qualitative research (Nursanjaya, 2021) .

This study was conducted in a Qur'anic kindergarten, involving 10 pairs of parents and children aged 4-6 years as the main participants. The research process was broadly divided into three core stages. The first stage, planning, involved coordinating with the Qur'anic Kindergarten teachers to carefully select relevant participants. The second stage was data collection, which was conducted through three main techniques: observation, interviews and documentation.

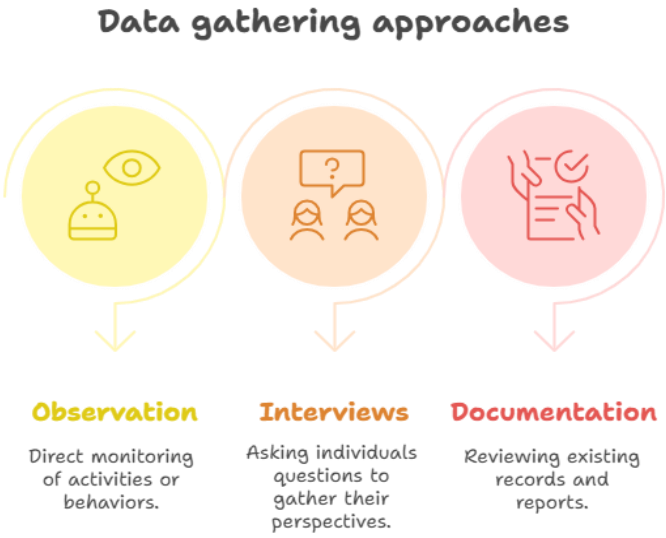

Figure 1. Research design

At the data collection stage, direct observations were made to observe how parents implemented their narratives of engaging children in physical activity and children's responses to limiting screen exposure field notes and visual documentation (photos/videos) were used to record findings. In-depth interviews were conducted with parents and children in their respective homes, focusing on their experiences and perceptions regarding the effectiveness of physical activity in diverting screen exposure. Finally, documentation (audio/visual) was conducted during interviews and observations to complement and strengthen the data collected. Once the data was collected, the data analysis phase was conducted in an inductive qualitative manner to identify relevant themes, patterns and categories from the Parental narratives.

This research instrument comprehensively investigates parents' strategies for shifting children's screen time to physical activities. It explores parental approaches such as offering physical activities as alternatives and establishing routines, and assesses parents' motivation, support, and awareness of the negative impacts of screen time. Additionally, the instrument examines specific child factors such as interests and energy levels, alongside environmental influences such as access to facilities and interactions with peers. The study identifies the main challenges and barriers faced by parents, including time constraints, reliance on gadgets, and the appeal of digital content.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study explored in depth the different strategies employed by parents to reduce the duration of their children's screen exposure. Key observations show that invitations to engage in shared play activities are the most dominant approach. This method not only creates quality moments of interaction between parents and children, but also effectively shifts children's focus away from digital devices. Variations in the implementation of this strategy were seen with some households imposing a specific schedule for physical activity, while others opted for a more spontaneous approach. This phenomenon indicates flexibility in the management of children's leisure time, but with the same end goal of encouraging physical activity as an alternative to digital entertainment.

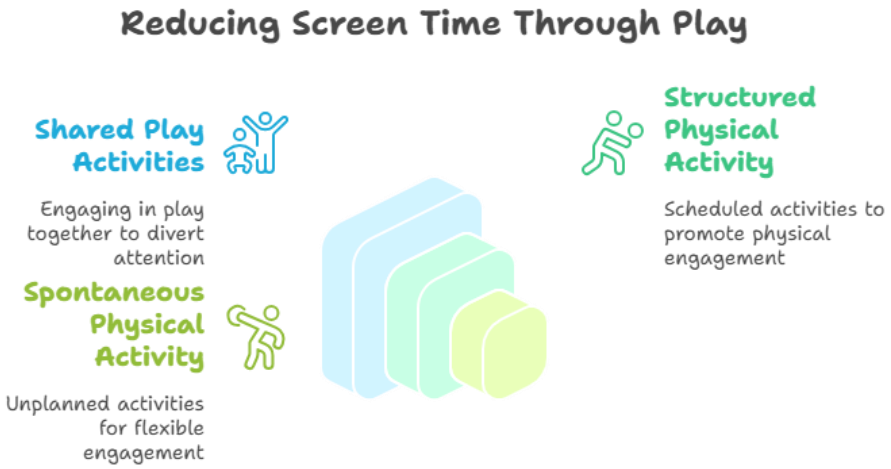

Figure 2: Parental strategies to reduce children's time

Children's participation in physical activities shows an interesting spectrum of responses. Most parents attempt to increase children's interest by involving them directly in the selection and planning of activities. This collaborative approach often yields positive results, as children feel in control of their choices. Some parents actively accompany their children in physical activities, such as cycling or walking. However, not all children respond with the same enthusiasm, with some showing fatigue or laziness. In this situation, the role of parents becomes crucial. They consistently provide extra encouragement, motivation and attention, which eventually overcomes the child's initial resistance and encourages active participation.

The support of the physical environment is also a determining factor in the success of this diversion effort. The availability of public open spaces, such as playing fields or parks, greatly facilitates children to interact and move freely outside the home. In addition, Parental awareness of the importance of a supportive environment is also reflected in their efforts to provide facilities within the home. Some families equip their homes with simple sports equipment, such as punching bags, or even mini playgrounds, creating a playground that is easily accessible at any time. The presence of these facilities significantly strengthens children's opportunities to engage in physical activity, reducing reliance on screen-based entertainment.

Deep concern about the negative impact of excessive screen exposure is a key driver for parental intervention. Many parents expressed serious concerns that prolonged screen exposure could lead to a drastic decrease in their child's physical activity levels, leading to

a passive lifestyle. Recognizing this risk motivates parents to proactively engage their children in a variety of physical activities, from morning runs to traditional games. This shows that awareness of the potential dangers of screen exposure forms a strong foundation for parental initiatives to encourage a more active lifestyle in children.

Parental support is not only limited to encouragement, but also includes emotional support and provision of resources. Parents actively provide encouragement, motivation and unrelenting moral support to their children. In addition, they also facilitate their children with the necessary tools or facilities to support physical activity, such as balls, rackets, or other equipment. This financial and emotional commitment reflects Parental investment in their child's holistic health and development, as well as their efforts to create an environment conducive to an active lifestyle.

One of the most interesting findings was the effectiveness of social interaction with peers in reducing children's screen exposure. When children engaged in group play with their friends, the appeal of screens was significantly reduced. In many cases, children even seemed to forget about their electronic devices because they were so engrossed in interacting and moving around with their friends. This phenomenon underscores that social play experiences outside the home can be a powerful antidote to the allure of gadgets, demonstrating the importance of encouraging group play opportunities for children.

However, the study also identified a significant challenge of the attraction of screens being stronger than physical activity in the eyes of children. Parents often acknowledge that the wide variety of online gaming available has created a digital magnet that is hard to resist. As a result, children tend to be glued to their screens and show reluctance to engage in movement or other physical activities. This highlights the fierce competition between instant digital entertainment and physical activity that requires initiative, a dilemma that modern parents continue to face.

Overall, the results of this study present a comprehensive picture of Parental proactive efforts in managing children's screen exposure through physical activity promotion. Although challenges such as the appeal of online gaming and children's initial resistance remained, the consistency of parental support, availability of supportive environments, and strength of social interactions proved to be key success factors. These findings confirm that a holistic approach, combining parental interventions with environmental and social support, is essential in forming healthy habits and minimizing the negative impact of screen exposure in children.

DISCUSSION

This discussion aims to further analyze the findings on Parental strategies to reduce children's screen exposure duration through encouraging physical activity. The results show that Parental primary approach to managing screen exposure is to engage children in shared play, which effectively shifts the focus away from digital devices. Variations of this strategy, either through dedicated schedules or flexible approaches, confirmed Parental aim to encourage physical activity as an alternative to digital entertainment.

This finding is very consistent with Albert Bandura's Social Learning/Social Cognitive Theory. This theory emphasizes that children learn a lot through observational learning (modeling), which is imitating the behavior of others, especially authority figures such as parents. When parents actively engage in "shared play", they directly model active behavior. Children observe and imitate the enjoyment and value parents place on physical

activity, and are thus more likely to adopt the behavior. In addition, the concept of self-efficacy is highly relevant. Parental confidence in managing children's screen time and their success in diverting children to physical activity will increase Parental own self-efficacy. Conversely, when children feel capable and successful in physical activity, their self-efficacy will also increase, which in turn reduces device dependence. Bandura's concept of reciprocal determinism also applies here: the parent's behavior influences the child, the environment the parent creates comes into play, and the child's own response also influences the parent's strategy. Thus, Parental dominant efforts to engage children in play reflect social learning principles that support healthy habits.

This study expands the understanding of Parental Narratives About Engaging Children In Physical Activity To Limit Screen Exposure by providing a more specific focus than previous research, while research (Simanjuntak, 2023) . discusses the increasing duration of screen exposure in children can lead to various behavioral problems in children. (Sasqiadisha, 2024) . Limiting children's screen time by familiarizing children with play time so that children understand the maximum duration of screen time by limiting it with a time agreement and using an alarm. (Faizah et al., 2022) . examines the role of parents, the urgency of cultural literacy based on local wisdom and several local wisdom-based activities that can reduce excessive screen exposure in children. (Kakon et al., 2025) shows that lack of supervision of screen time has a negative impact on children's health. Therefore, the role of parents is crucial in developing effective guidelines to manage children's screen use. (Jourdren et al., 2023) suggests overexposure to screens impairs children's focus, so their use needs to be carefully limited, although there are other factors at play. (Zhang et al., 2022) found positive associations between recommended screen exposure and intellectual ability and language development, while most other screen exposure durations showed no significant associations.

This study makes an important contribution by identifying strategies for a collaborative parental approach to engaging children in physical activity as an effective way to reduce screen exposure. Children's participation responses to physical activity invitations showed an interesting spectrum. Most parents adopted a collaborative approach by involving children in the activity selection and planning process. This approach has proven effective in fostering interest and ownership in children. Having parents actively accompany children in physical activity reinforces the effectiveness of this strategy. However, it should be recognized that not all children respond with the same enthusiasm, showing reluctance or fatigue. In this situation, the consistent role of parents in providing extra encouragement, motivation and attention is crucial. The significance of these findings is that sustained and adaptive parental intervention is essential to overcome children's initial resistance, in line with social learning theory where role modeling and positive support play a major role.

Support from the physical environment was identified as an important factor influencing the success of screen exposure diversion efforts. The availability of public open spaces such as playing fields or parks provides a platform for children for social interaction and physical activity. Moreover, Parental awareness in providing internal facilities at home, such as simple sports equipment or play areas, shows their commitment to creating a conducive environment.

Parental deep concern about the negative impact of excessive screen exposure was the main driver behind their intervention. Parents expressed significant concern that prolonged screen exposure could result in a drastic decrease in physical activity and promotion of a sedentary lifestyle. Awareness of potential harms such as childhood obesity or delayed motor development motivated parents to proactively encourage their children to participate in various physical activities. This confirms that high risk perception drives preventive behavior, with parents being the primary agents in instilling healthy habits.

Parental support is not limited to encouragement, but includes emotional aspects and provision of resources. Parents actively provide endless encouragement, motivation and moral support, as well as facilitate the tools or means that children need for physical activity. This emotional and financial commitment reflects Parental holistic investment in their children's health and development. These findings reinforce the concept of Parental role as key facilitators in the development of children's healthy behaviors, similar to Bandura's research on self-efficacy, where environmental support and verbal encouragement increase children's confidence to participate.

Social interaction with peers is a very effective strategy to reduce children's dependence on screens. When children play in groups, the appeal of gadgets is greatly reduced, often leading them to forget about electronic devices altogether. This phenomenon suggests that social play experiences outside the home can be a stronger antidote than the allure of gadgets. This finding is in line with Erik Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development, specifically at the Initiative vs. Guilt stage which occurs at the age of 3 to 5 years (Khairunnisa Nazwa Kamilla et al., 2022) . At this stage, children have a natural drive to take initiative, plan activities and actively participate in play with peers. Opportunities for group play and social interaction support them in exploring the environment, testing their skills and actively interacting with others. A social environment that supports this initiative-through physical activity and play-will strengthen children's sense of purpose and confidence. Conversely, if their initiative is hampered, for example by too much passive screen time, children may develop guilt or feelings of inadequacy. Therefore, the fact that social interaction and physical play are basic needs of children, which if met, naturally reduce the need for digital stimulation, is very consistent with Erikson's views. Encouraging social interactions between children not only serves as an effective strategy to limit screen exposure, but is also important to support children's psychosocial development so that they can build healthy initiatives.

However, the study also identified the significant challenge of the lure of screens still being stronger than physical activity in the eyes of children. Parents acknowledged that the variety of online gaming available creates an irresistible attraction, causing children to be glued to the screen and reluctant to move. This highlights the intense competition between instant digital entertainment and physical activity that requires initiative. The limitations of this study may lie in the sample coverage which has not represented the entire socio-economic spectrum or geographical variations. For future research, it is recommended to develop more specific interventions that focus not only on solicitation, but also the positive integration of gaming or technological elements into physical activity, as well as compare the effectiveness of these strategies across different age groups of children. In addition, quantitative studies with larger samples could more accurately measure these impacts.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

This study highlights that increased screen exposure among Generation Alpha poses significant risks to children's physical activity, social interactions and overall health. The findings suggest that parents have adopted various proactive strategies, such as engaging in shared play, establishing a supportive home environment, and fostering peer interactions, to mitigate these risks. Although digital entertainment remains a strong contender, consistent parental engagement and opportunities for social play have proven effective in promoting a more active lifestyle. The results of this study contribute to the broader literature on the role of parents in managing children's digital habits and suggest that a holistic approach integrating family, environmental, and social support is critical in shaping healthier behaviors. Future research is encouraged to examine long-term impacts and explore innovative interventions that combine technology with active play.

Suggestions

Parents are encouraged to proactively develop a balanced daily schedule for their children, which includes a clear allocation of time for screen exposure, outdoor play, learning, and social interaction without screens.

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