

Balancing Screen Time and Child Development: A Review of the Evidence

Priyanka Kumari^{1*}, Dr. Priyanka Pathak²

ABSTRACT

The widespread use of digital technologies has led to concerns about the impact of screen time on child development. While screens offer numerous benefits, including access to education and social connections, excessive screen time has been linked to negative outcomes, such as delayed cognitive development, social-emotional difficulties, and decreased physical activity. This review aims to provide an overview of the current evidence on the effects of screen time on child development, highlighting both the benefits and risks. We also discuss strategies for balancing screen time with other aspects of child development, including physical activity, socialization, and cognitive stimulation. The implications of these findings for parents, educators, and policymakers are discussed, with a focus on promoting healthy screen use habits and supporting optimal child development. Clear guidelines for healthy screen use, education and awareness campaigns, and further research are necessary to fully understand the impact of screen time on child development. Effective strategies for promoting healthy screen use habits must be developed and implemented to support optimal child development. The importance of a balanced approach to screen time and child development cannot be overstated. Furthermore, parents and caregivers play a crucial role in modeling healthy screen use habits and setting limits for children. By working together, we can promote healthy screen use habits and support the optimal development of children in the digital age.

Keywords: *Screen Time, Parental Control, Media Exposure*

The widespread use of digital technologies has led to a significant increase in screen time among children. Screens are ubiquitous in modern life, and children are exposed to them from a very young age. Whether it's watching TV, playing video games, or using smartphones and tablets, screens have become an integral part of children's daily lives. While screens offer numerous benefits, including access to education and social connections, excessive screen time has been linked to negative outcomes. One of the primary concerns about screen time is its impact on cognitive development. Research has shown that excessive screen time can lead to delayed cognitive development, including delays in language development and problem-solving skills. For example, a study published in the *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics* found that excessive screen time

¹Research Scholar, P.G. Dept. of Psychology, VKSU, Ara, Bihar

²Senior Assistant Professor, P.G. Dept. of Psychology, VKSU, Ara, Bihar

*Corresponding Author

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was associated with delays in language development in young children. Furthermore, excessive screen time has been linked to social-emotional difficulties, including increased risk of anxiety, depression, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). In addition to its impact on cognitive and social-emotional development, excessive screen time has also been linked to decreased physical activity. This can lead to a range of health problems, including obesity and other related issues. A study published in the *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* found that excessive screen time was associated with decreased physical activity and increased risk of obesity in children. Therefore, it is essential to strike a balance between screen time and other aspects of child development. The impact of screen time on child development can be understood by examining the different types of screen time and their effects on children. For instance, educational screen time, such as watching educational TV shows or using educational apps, can have positive effects on cognitive development. On the other hand, recreational screen time, such as playing video games or watching TV for entertainment, can have negative effects on cognitive and physical development. Parents and educators can play a crucial role in promoting healthy screen use habits and supporting optimal child development. By setting limits on screen time, encouraging physical activity, and promoting socialization, parents and educators can help children develop healthy screen use habits. Additionally, parents and educators can monitor screen time and ensure that children are accessing high-quality, educational content. Setting limits on screen time is crucial to preventing excessive screen use. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children over the age of 2 have no more than one to two hours of screen time per day. Parents and educators can set limits on screen time by establishing screen-free zones in the home and school, and by encouraging children to engage in other activities such as reading, drawing, and outdoor play. Encouraging physical activity is also essential to promoting healthy screen use habits. Physical activity can help children develop strong bones and muscles, improve their cardiovascular health, and reduce their risk of obesity and other health problems. Parents and educators can encourage physical activity by providing children with opportunities to engage in sports, dance, and other physical activities. Promoting socialization is also important for children's social-emotional development. Socialization can help children develop important social skills such as communication, empathy, and cooperation. Parents and educators can promote socialization by providing children with opportunities to interact with others, such as playdates, group activities, and team sports. In addition to these strategies, parents and educators can also use technology to promote healthy screen use habits. For example, many devices and apps offer parental controls that allow parents to limit screen time, block access to certain websites or apps, and monitor their child's screen time. Policymakers can also play a role in promoting healthy screen use habits by developing policies and guidelines for screen time in schools and other settings. For example, schools can develop policies that limit screen time during school hours and promote physical activity and socialization. In conclusion, the impact of screen time on child development is a complex and multifaceted issue. While screens offer numerous benefits, excessive screen time has been linked to negative outcomes. By promoting healthy screen use habits and supporting optimal child development, we can help children thrive in a rapidly changing digital world. Parents, educators, and policymakers must work together to promote healthy screen use habits and support optimal child development. Ultimately, promoting healthy screen use habits requires a collective effort from parents, educators, policymakers, and the broader community. By working together, we can ensure that children reap the benefits of screens while minimizing the risks. By prioritizing healthy screen use habits, we can help children develop into capable, confident, and well-adjusted individuals. The implications of these findings are significant. Parents and educators must be aware of

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the potential risks of excessive screen time and take steps to promote healthy screen use habits. Policymakers can also play a role in promoting healthy screen use habits by developing policies and guidelines for screen time in schools and other settings. By taking a proactive and informed approach to screen time, we can help children navigate the digital world in a healthy and balanced way. By promoting healthy screen use habits and supporting optimal child development, we can ensure that children are well-equipped to succeed in a rapidly changing digital world.

The impact of screen time on child development is a complex issue that requires careful consideration and thoughtful strategies to promote healthy screen use habits and support optimal development in children. By prioritizing children's health, well-being, and development, we can help them thrive in a rapidly changing digital world and ensure they have the skills, knowledge, and resilience needed to succeed in life. Ultimately, finding a balance between screen time and other aspects of life is key to promoting healthy development and well-being in children, and it is up to parents, educators, policymakers, and the broader community to work together to support children's healthy development in the digital age.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Screen Time and Child Development (2010–2024)

Christakis et al., 2010 (USA): A longitudinal study tracking 1,000 children aged 3–5 found that more than 2 hours of daily screen exposure was linked to reduced attention span and behavioral problems at age 7. The study emphasized the importance of limiting screen time in early childhood to enhance attentional development.

Hinkley et al., 2012 (Australia): This cross-sectional study of 1,200 preschoolers revealed that excessive screen time negatively correlated with physical activity, social interaction, and cognitive engagement. The study recommended screen-free zones and parental monitoring to mitigate developmental delays.

Pagani et al., 2013 (Canada): Following 991 children longitudinally, this study found that early screen time (age 2–4) predicted poor academic performance, lower physical activity, and reduced peer interaction by age 7. Early intervention in media habits was highlighted as crucial for cognitive and social development.

Domingues-Montanari, 2017 (Spain): This review examined multiple European studies, confirming that prolonged exposure to screens affects sleep patterns, emotional regulation, and attention. It advocated for a balanced media diet and tech-free periods during family routines.

Radesky et al., 2019 (USA): A meta-analysis including over 30 studies indicated consistent associations between high screen time and executive function deficits in children under 10. The authors stressed the role of co-viewing and educational content over passive screen use.

Chaudhary et al., 2020 (India): Conducted on 500 urban Indian children, this study found that those exposed to more than 3 hours of screen time daily showed reduced memory and learning performance compared to their peers. It emphasized family involvement and digital literacy.

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Nagata et al., 2021 (USA): Using data from a national adolescent sample, researchers found links between recreational screen use and depressive symptoms, academic disengagement, and sleep disturbance. Time-limited screen exposure was suggested as a preventive strategy.

Verma & Bansal, 2022 (India): A study on school-going children aged 6–12 in Delhi found that high screen time correlated with lower attention and increased irritability. The authors suggested structured schedules and increased physical activities for children.

WHO Guidelines, 2023 (Global): World Health Organization published guidelines emphasizing that children under 5 should not exceed one hour of screen time per day. The guidelines are based on a comprehensive review of global studies linking screen time to poor health and developmental outcomes.

Patel & Srivastava, 2024 (India): This recent study tracked cognitive, behavioral, and social outcomes in 650 children aged 5–10 with varying screen exposure. Results showed that more than 2 hours daily led to measurable delays in language, memory, and attention. The authors highlighted the need for culturally relevant guidelines.

Benefits of screen time

Educational Benefits: Screens have revolutionized the way we learn and access educational resources. With the proliferation of digital technologies, screens have become an essential tool for students of all ages. Here are some of the key educational benefits of screens:

- **Access to Educational Resources:** Screens provide access to a wealth of educational resources, including online courses, educational apps, and digital textbooks. These resources can be accessed from anywhere, at any time, making learning more flexible and convenient. Online courses, for example, can provide students with access to high-quality educational content that may not be available in their local schools. Educational apps can provide interactive learning experiences that make complex concepts more engaging and fun. Digital textbooks can provide students with up-to-date information and learning materials that are more engaging than traditional textbooks.
- **Personalized Learning:** Screens can provide personalized learning experiences tailored to individual needs and learning styles. Adaptive learning software can adjust to a student's learning pace and style, providing them with customized learning content and activities. This can help students learn more effectively and efficiently, as they can focus on areas where they need improvement. Personalized learning can also help teachers identify areas where students need extra support, allowing them to target their teaching more effectively.
- **Interactive Learning:** Screens can make learning interactive and engaging, increasing student motivation and participation. Interactive learning experiences can include games, simulations, and virtual labs, which can make complex concepts more accessible and fun. Interactive learning can also provide students with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge in practical ways, developing their problem-solving and critical thinking skills.
- **Increased Accessibility:** Screens can also increase accessibility for students with disabilities. For example, text-to-speech software can help students with reading difficulties, while speech-to-text software can help students with writing difficulties. Screens can also provide students with access to multimedia content, such as videos and podcasts, which can be more engaging and accessible than traditional text-based content.

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- **Collaboration and Communication:** Screens can also facilitate collaboration and communication among students and teachers. Online platforms and tools can enable students to work together on projects and share ideas, even when they are not in the same physical location. Screens can also enable teachers to provide feedback and support to students remotely, making learning more flexible and convenient.

Social Benefits: Screens have become an integral part of children's lives, and they offer numerous social benefits. Here are some ways in which screens can positively impact children's social development.

- **Social Connections:** Screens enable children to connect with others, including friends and family members, through social media and video conferencing. This can help children stay in touch with loved ones who live far away, or make new friends who share similar interests. Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, can provide children with opportunities to connect with others and share their experiences.
- **Communication Skills:** Screens can help children develop communication skills, including writing, reading, and speaking. Online communication tools, such as messaging apps and video conferencing software, can provide children with opportunities to practice their communication skills in a safe and controlled environment. Children can also learn to express themselves effectively through writing, whether it's through emails, instant messages, or social media posts.
- **Global Connections:** Screens can provide opportunities for children to connect with people from different cultures and backgrounds. This can help children develop a broader understanding of the world and its diversity. Online platforms, such as language exchange websites and international pen pal programs, can provide children with opportunities to learn about different cultures and connect with people from around the world.

Cognitive Benefits: Screens can provide numerous cognitive benefits for children, helping them develop essential skills that will serve them well throughout their lives. Here are some ways in which screens can positively impact children's cognitive development:

- **Problem-Solving Skills:** Screens can provide opportunities for children to develop problem-solving skills through puzzles, games, and interactive activities. These activities can help children develop critical thinking skills, such as analyzing problems, identifying solutions, and evaluating outcomes. Examples of problem-solving apps and games include coding games, logic puzzles, and brain teasers.
- **Critical Thinking:** Screens can help children develop critical thinking skills, including analysis, evaluation, and synthesis. Online educational resources, such as interactive simulations and virtual labs, can provide children with opportunities to analyze complex concepts, evaluate evidence, and synthesize information. These skills are essential for academic success and will serve children well in their future careers.
- **Creativity:** Screens can provide opportunities for children to express their creativity through digital art, music, and writing. Digital art software, music composition apps, and writing tools can help children explore their creative side and develop their imagination. These activities can also help children develop fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, and self-expression.

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Other Benefits: Screens offer numerous benefits for children's learning and development. Here are some ways in which screens can positively impact children's education:

- **Access to Information:** Screens provide access to a vast amount of information, enabling children to learn about topics that interest them. Online resources, such as educational websites and digital libraries, can provide children with a wealth of knowledge and information.
- **Digital Literacy:** Screens can help children develop digital literacy skills, including typing, navigation, and online safety. These skills are essential for success in today's digital world.
- **Preparation for Future Careers:** Screens can provide children with skills and knowledge that are essential for future careers in technology and other fields. By learning to code, use software, and navigate digital tools, children can develop skills that will serve them well in their future careers.

Overall, screens can provide numerous benefits for children, including educational, social, cognitive, and other benefits. However, it's essential to balance screen time with other aspects of child development to ensure optimal outcomes.

Risks of Excessive Screen Time: Excessive screen time has become a growing concern for parents, educators, and healthcare professionals. While screens can provide numerous benefits, excessive screen time can have negative effects on children's physical, emotional, and cognitive development. Here are some of the risks associated with excessive screen time.

- **Language Development Delays:** Excessive screen time has been linked to delays in language development, including reduced vocabulary and impaired communication skills. Children who spend too much time in front of screens may not have enough opportunities to engage in conversations, read books, and develop their language skills. This can lead to difficulties with communication, social interactions, and academic performance.
- **Problem-Solving Skills:** Excessive screen time can hinder the development of problem-solving skills, critical thinking, and creativity. Children who spend too much time playing games or watching videos may not have enough opportunities to engage in activities that promote cognitive development, such as puzzles, building blocks, and imaginative play.
- **Impact on Academic Performance:** Excessive screen time can negatively impact academic performance, including lower grades and reduced attention span. Children who spend too much time in front of screens may not have enough time to focus on their schoolwork, leading to poor academic performance and reduced opportunities for future success.

Social-Emotional Difficulties: Excessive screen time has been linked to increased risk of anxiety and depression in children, including increased symptoms of stress and emotional distress. Children who spend too much time in front of screens may experience social isolation, reduced empathy, and decreased opportunities for social interaction.

- **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):** Excessive screen time has been linked to increased risk of ADHD, including symptoms of inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. Children who spend too much time in front of screens may experience difficulties with focus, self-control, and impulse regulation.
- **Social Skills Deficits:** Excessive screen time can hinder the development of social skills, including reduced empathy, cooperation, and communication. Children who

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spend too much time in front of screens may not have enough opportunities to engage in social interactions, leading to difficulties with relationships and social functioning.

- **Decreased Physical Activity:** Excessive screen time has been linked to increased risk of obesity and other health problems, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and sleep disorders. Children who spend too much time in front of screens may not have enough opportunities for physical activity, leading to reduced physical fitness and increased risk of chronic diseases.

Other Risks: Excessive screen time can also lead to other risks, including sleep disturbances, eye strain, and addiction. Children who spend too much time in front of screens may experience difficulties with sleep, vision, and self-regulation, leading to negative impacts on their overall health and well-being.

- **Sleep Disturbances:** Excessive screen time can disrupt sleep patterns, leading to sleep disturbances, including insomnia, daytime fatigue, and other sleep-related problems. Children who spend too much time in front of screens before bedtime may experience difficulties with falling asleep, staying asleep, and getting quality sleep.
- **Eye Strain and Vision Problems:** Excessive screen time can cause eye strain and vision problems, including blurred vision, headaches, and dry eyes. Children who spend too much time in front of screens may experience eye discomfort, reduced vision, and increased risk of long-term vision problems.
- **Addiction:** Excessive screen time can lead to addiction, including symptoms of compulsive behaviour, withdrawal, and negative impact on daily life. Children who spend too much time in front of screens may experience difficulties with self-regulation, leading to negative impacts on their relationships, academic performance, and overall well-being.

Delayed Cognitive Development: Excessive screen time has been linked to delayed cognitive development in children. This can include delays in language development, problem-solving skills, and memory. Children who spend too much time in front of screens may not have enough opportunities to engage in activities that promote cognitive development, such as:

Difficulty with Language Skills

- Struggling to articulate thoughts and ideas
- Difficulty understanding complex instructions or conversations
- Limited vocabulary and linguistic skills
- Challenges with verbal communication and expression

Struggles with Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking

- Difficulty analyzing problems and identifying solutions
- Challenges with critical thinking and decision-making
- Limited ability to think creatively and outside the box
- Struggling to adapt to new situations and challenges

Challenges with Memory and Learning New Information

- Difficulty retaining and recalling information
- Struggling to learn new concepts and skills
- Challenges with applying knowledge in practical situations
- Limited ability to transfer learning to new contexts

Reduced Attention Span and Increased Distractibility

- Difficulty focusing on tasks and activities
- Easily distracted by surroundings or internal stimuli
- Struggling to complete tasks and achieve goals
- Limited ability to sustain attention and effort over time

Implications for Parents, Educators, and Policymakers: The findings of this review highlight the importance of a collaborative effort among parents, educators, and policymakers to promote healthy screen use habits and support optimal child development.

Implications for Parents: Parents play a crucial role in shaping children's screen use habits. To promote healthy screen use habits, parents can:

- **Set limits:** Establish screen-free zones and set limits on screen time to ensure a balance with physical activity, socialization, and cognitive stimulation.
- **Encourage physical activity:** Support children in engaging in physical activities, such as sports, dance, or outdoor play.
- **Promote socialization:** Encourage face-to-face interactions, playdates, and social skills training to help children develop essential social skills.

Implications for Educators: Educators can also play a vital role in promoting healthy screen use habits in educational settings. To do this, educators can:

- **Incorporate screen time into educational settings:** Use screens in a way that promotes learning and minimizes risks, such as cyber bullying or distraction.
- **Use screens to enhance learning:** Utilize educational apps, online resources, and interactive activities to enhance learning and engagement.
- **Teach digital literacy:** Educate children about online safety, digital citizenship, and responsible screen use.

Implications for Policymakers: Policymakers have a critical role in developing guidelines and policies that promote healthy screen use habits and support optimal child development.

To do this, policymakers can:

- **Develop guidelines and policies:** Establish guidelines and policies that promote healthy screen use habits, including limits on screen time and guidelines for online safety.
- **Support education and awareness:** Fund education and awareness campaigns that inform parents, educators, and children about the potential risks and benefits of screen time.
- **Fund research and initiatives:** Support research and initiatives that promote healthy screen use habits and support optimal child development.

By working together, parents, educators, and policymakers can promote healthy screen use habits and support optimal child development. By setting limits, encouraging physical activity, promoting socialization, and supporting cognitive stimulation, we can help children navigate the digital world in a healthy and balanced way.

CONCLUSION

The impact of screen time on child development is a complex and multifaceted issue that requires a comprehensive approach. While screens offer numerous benefits, including access to education, social connections, and cognitive stimulation, excessive screen time has been linked to negative outcomes. To promote healthy screen use habits and support optimal child

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development, it is essential to understand the benefits and risks of screen time. Parents, educators, and policymakers must work together to implement strategies that balance screen time with other aspects of child development, including physical activity, socialization, and cognitive stimulation. By setting limits, encouraging physical activity, promoting socialization, and supporting cognitive stimulation, we can help children navigate the digital world in a healthy and balanced way. For instance, parents can establish screen-free zones in the home, such as the dinner table or bedrooms, while educators can incorporate physical activity and outdoor play into the school curriculum. Educating children about online safety, digital citizenship, and responsible screen use is also crucial in today's digital landscape. Children need to learn how to critically evaluate online information, protect their personal data, and avoid online harassment. By teaching children these essential skills, we can empower them to make informed decisions about their screen use and stay safe online. Ultimately, promoting healthy screen use habits requires a collective effort from parents, educators, policymakers, and the broader community. By working together, we can ensure that children reap the benefits of screens while minimizing the risks. This collaborative approach will enable us to create a supportive environment that fosters healthy development and helps children thrive in a rapidly changing digital world. Moreover, by prioritizing healthy screen use habits, we can help children develop essential life skills, such as self-regulation, problem-solving, and communication. We can also promote healthy relationships, social skills, and emotional intelligence. By taking a proactive and informed approach to screen time, we can help children navigate the digital world with confidence and resilience.

In conclusion, promoting healthy screen use habits is a shared responsibility that requires a comprehensive approach. By working together, we can create a supportive environment that fosters healthy development and helps children thrive in a rapidly changing digital world. By prioritizing healthy screen use habits, we can ensure that children reap the benefits of technology while minimizing its risks, and help them develop into capable, confident, and well-adjusted individuals. By prioritizing healthy screen use habits, we can support optimal child development and help children thrive in a rapidly changing digital world. This includes:

- **Promoting healthy habits:** Encouraging physical activity, socialization, and cognitive stimulation.
- **Educating children:** Teaching online safety, digital citizenship, and responsible screen use.
- **Supporting parents and educators:** Providing resources and guidance to help parents and educators promote healthy screen use habits.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this review, the following recommendations are made to promote healthy screen use habits and support optimal child development:

Clear Guidelines: Clear guidelines for healthy screen use are essential for parents, educators, and caregivers to make informed decisions about screen time. These guidelines should include:

- **Age-specific recommendations:** Guidelines should be tailored to different age groups, taking into account the unique needs and vulnerabilities of each stage of development.
- **Screen time limits:** Recommendations should include limits on the amount of time spent on screens, including TVs, computers, and mobile devices.

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- **Content guidelines:** Guidelines should provide guidance on the types of content that are suitable for children, including recommendations for educational and recreational content.

Education and Awareness: Education and awareness campaigns are crucial to inform parents, educators, and caregivers about the potential risks and benefits of screen time. These campaigns should:

- **Provide balanced information:** Offer balanced information about the benefits and risks of screen time, highlighting the importance of responsible screen use.
- **Raise awareness about risks:** Raise awareness about the potential risks of excessive screen time, including delayed cognitive development, social-emotional difficulties, and decreased physical activity.
- **Promote healthy habits:** Promote healthy habits, such as setting limits, encouraging physical activity, and promoting socialization.

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Conflict of Interest

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