

**Analyzing the Effects of Electronic Gadget Usage  
on the Social and Emotional Development of Preschoolers**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examined the relationship between electronic device use and the social and emotional development of preschoolers at a public elementary school in Lapu-Lapu City, Philippines. Using a descriptive-correlational design, data were collected from parent-respondents via an adopted questionnaire assessing children's exposure to gadgets and observed developmental behaviors. Findings revealed that preschoolers were frequently exposed to electronic gadgets, indicating that digital devices have become a regular part of their daily routines. While parents demonstrated active supervision, gadget use was found to have a moderate effect on children's social and emotional development, particularly in emotional responses and social interaction. Moreover, a significant relationship was identified between gadget usage and social-emotional development, suggesting that variations in exposure are associated with differences in developmental outcomes. The study highlights the importance of balanced and guided gadget use and emphasizes the role of parental involvement in supporting children's development. An intervention plan was proposed to promote responsible gadget use and enhance preschoolers' social and emotional well-being.

**Keywords:** Electronic gadgets, social-emotional development, preschoolers, parental mediation, early childhood.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Early childhood is a critical stage in human development, as children acquire foundational social and emotional competencies essential for lifelong learning and well-being. During the preschool years, children grow and develop emotional regulation, empathy, and social interaction primarily through direct exposure and engagement with their actual dealings in the environment. These early experiences shape how children respond to social situations and manage emotional challenges and expectations.

Children today are naturally familiar with technology, having grown up in an increasingly digital world. From an early age, they are exposed to electronic gadgets such as smartphones, tablets, and other digital devices, which have become a regular part of their daily experiences. While this early exposure allows children to develop technological skills, it also

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raises important concerns regarding its potential influence on their social and emotional development.

In recent years, the increasing accessibility of electronic gadgets has significantly influenced children's daily routines. Digital devices are now commonly used for entertainment, communication, and even early learning. While these technologies offer potential benefits, concerns have emerged regarding their effects on young children's development, particularly when exposure is excessive or unguided.

Research suggests that prolonged screen exposure may limit opportunities for active play and meaningful interpersonal interaction, which are essential for developing social competence and emotional regulation. Children who spend more time engaged with digital devices may exhibit reduced participation in social activities, increased emotional sensitivity, and difficulties in communication. At the same time, studies indicate that the effects of gadget use depend largely on how technology is utilized, including the type of content accessed and the degree of parental involvement.

In the Philippine context, the use of gadgets among preschoolers has become increasingly prevalent. Many children are exposed to digital devices both at home and in educational settings, often at an early age. Observations indicate that some children prefer solitary activities and may experience challenges with social interaction and emotional expression. Despite the growing body of international research, localized studies that examine these effects within specific school environments remain limited.

#### Statement of the problem

This study aimed to examine the relationship between the use of electronic devices and the social and emotional development of preschoolers. It also served as a basis for developing an intervention plan to promote balanced gadget use and support children's holistic development.

#### METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to examine the relationship between gadget usage and preschoolers' social and emotional development. The descriptive component was used to determine the level of gadget exposure and developmental outcomes, while the correlational component assessed the association between the variables.

The study was conducted at Lapu-Lapu Central School. The respondents were parents of preschool learners, selected through random sampling across different Kindergarten sections. A total of 100 parent-respondents participated in the study.

Data were collected using an adopted questionnaire consisting of three parts: respondents' profile, extent of gadget usage, and indicators of social and emotional development. The instrument was reviewed and modified to ensure its suitability for the study's context.

Statistical tools such as frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation were used to analyze the data. Ethical standards were strictly observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that preschoolers were frequently exposed to electronic gadgets, indicating that digital devices have become an integral part of their daily routines. Gadgets were commonly used for entertainment, engagement, and, in some cases, early learning

activities. This reflects the increasing integration of technology into children's everyday experiences.

The effects of gadget usage on social and emotional development were found to be moderate. Children demonstrated behaviors such as emotional sensitivity when gadget use was restricted, preference for solitary activities, and reduced engagement in peer interaction. These observations suggest that exposure to gadgets may influence children's emotional regulation and social participation.

These findings align with recent research indicating that excessive screen exposure may contribute to emotional difficulties, reduced social interaction, and increased dependence on digital devices for comfort and stimulation. However, the moderate level of effect observed in this study suggests that these influences are not entirely detrimental and may be moderated by other factors, particularly parental involvement.

Parents in this study were generally observed to monitor and guide their children's use of gadgets. This level of supervision may have helped mitigate the potential negative effects of excessive screen exposure. Studies emphasize that children who receive guided, structured digital engagement tend to demonstrate more balanced social and emotional outcomes than those with unrestricted access to devices.

Furthermore, the study revealed a significant relationship between gadget usage and preschoolers' social and emotional development. This indicates that variations in gadget exposure are associated with differences in children's behavioral and emotional outcomes. Increased exposure may influence children's interaction patterns, emotional responses, and behavioral tendencies, particularly when it replaces opportunities for active play and social interaction.

The findings support the view that children's development is shaped by their environment and daily experiences. Digital gadgets, as part of the modern environment, function as both tools for learning and potential sources of behavioral influence. The impact of gadget use depends largely on how it is managed in home and school environments.

Overall, the results suggest that while gadget use is prevalent and unavoidable in contemporary childhood, its effects on development can be managed through proper guidance, supervision, and balanced engagement.

## CONCLUSION

The use of electronic devices is a prevalent aspect of preschoolers' daily experiences and is significantly associated with their social and emotional development. While the observed effects were moderate, they had meaningful influences on children's behavior, emotional responses, and social interactions. The findings highlight the importance of parental guidance in ensuring that gadget use supports rather than hinders children's development. Collaborative efforts among parents and educators are essential in promoting responsible digital habits among young learners.

The findings of the study have important implications for educators, parents, and policymakers. Schools may integrate structured guidelines for device use to ensure that digital tools are used in a developmentally appropriate manner. Parents are encouraged to actively monitor and guide their children's use of gadgets to promote balanced development. Policymakers may also consider developing programs that support responsible digital engagement among young children.

This study was limited to preschoolers in one public school, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. The reliance on parent-reported data may also introduce

subjective bias. Future studies may consider involving multiple schools and incorporating observational or mixed methods approaches to validate the results.

It is recommended that schools and parents collaboratively implement a structured intervention plan to promote balanced, developmentally appropriate gadget use among preschoolers. The plan should emphasize parental guidance, regulated screen time, and increased engagement in social and play-based activities to support children's overall development.

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