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Impact of Electronic Media on Socio-Emotional Development of Preschool Children: Parents' Perceptions

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Abstract

This study investigated the parental perceptions of the effects of electronic media on the socio-emotional development of preschool children in the Kalutara District, Sri Lanka. It explores the positive and negative impacts of electronic media exposure, considering factors such as accessibility, type of programme/activity and duration of use. A total of 377 parents were randomly selected from preschool children attending preschools in the Kalutara District**.** The sample was stratified to include urban and rural settings to ensure representation across different socio-economic backgrounds. A survey method was chosen, and data were collected from a piloted and validated structured questionnaire with a 5-point Likert scale, which included information on types of electronic media accessed by children, duration of use and programme preference. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution and graphic presentations were used to summarize media usage patterns and socio-emotional development indicators. The impact of electronic media on socio-emotional development indicated both positive and negative relationships. The study found that while most parents hold a positive attitude toward electronic media, a majority were aware that electronic media lead to aggressive behaviour, prevent children from forming healthy relationships with adults and peers, promote unhealthy competition among children, become addicted to electronic media and negatively affects the socio-emotional development of children. Based on the findings, guidelines were developed to help parents model healthy media habits, while recommendations were made for policymakers to offer training and resources to support parents in managing screen time, selecting appropriate content and engaging in co-viewing.

Keywords: Parent's perceptions, impact of electronic media, socio-emotional development, preschool children

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Introduction

In recent years, the pervasive influence of electronic media has transformed various aspects of people's daily lives, including the developmental experiences of preschool children. In Sri Lanka, where traditional practices and modern technologies intersect, parents' understanding of the impact of electronic media on preschool children's socio-emotional development has become increasingly pertinent. As smartphones, computers, and televisions have become increasingly common, it is essential to examine how these digital interactions impact the development, particularly the socio-emotional growth, of preschool children. The socio-emotional domain encompasses critical developmental milestones such as emotional regulation, social skills, and self-concept. It includes children's experiences, expressions, management, and ability to form positive relationships with those around them (Shaikh, 2021). According to Shala (2013), it is about an individual's relationship with others, one's level of self-control, motivation, and persistence in an activity.

For preschool children in Sri Lanka, these skills have traditionally been fostered through family interactions, community activities, and educational settings. However, the integration of electronic media into daily routines has introduced new factors that may either support or hinder these developmental processes. Electronic media can offer significant educational benefits, including exposure to diverse content and interactive learning opportunities. The use of educational apps and programmes can create opportunities for children to learn early literacy, math, and problem-solving skills, potentially providing them with a foundation for future academic success (Meyer et al., 2021). Moreover, electronic media can be a valuable tool for parents and educators, offering resources supporting early learning and development.

Conversely, there are concerns about the potential negative impacts of excessive screen time. Research from various contexts suggests that overuse of electronic media may impair face-to-face social interactions, hinder emotional regulation, and contribute to behavioural issues (Coyne et al., 2021). In the Sri Lankan context, these concerns are compounded by the influence of global media, which may affect traditional cultural norms and values. The integration of electronic media into daily life has become increasingly prevalent across the globe, including in Sri Lanka. As the accessibility of electronic media such as smartphones, computers, and televisions grow, so does their influence on the developmental experiences of preschool children (Antar, 2019). While electronic media offers potential benefits such as educational content and interactive learning opportunities, it also poses challenges that could impact the socio-emotional development of young children. The socio-emotional domain, which encompasses essential developmental aspects like emotional regulation, social skills, and self-concept, is particularly vulnerable to the effects of media exposure (Niiranen et al., 2021). Given the unique socio-cultural and economic contexts, it is critical to understand how these electronic media interactions affect preschool children in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by investigating the parental perceived effects of electronic media on the socio-emotional development of preschool children in Sri Lanka.

Aim and Objectives

The main aim of the study was to explore the impact of electronic media on the socio-emotional development of preschool children in Sri Lanka.

The specific objectives were to:

1. Identify parents' perceptions of the impact of preschool children's exposure to electronic media on their social and emotional development.
2. Examine parents' views on the effects of excessive electronic media use by preschool children on their social and emotional development.
3. Identify the types of programmes parents perceive as beneficial or detrimental to children's social and emotional development.
4. Analyse whether parents' perceptions differ significantly based on their demographic characteristics.

Review of Literature

Media include technologies of sensation, feelings, taste, relationship and influence (De Vries & Weber, 2001; Hoover, 2006; Stolow, 2013) and differ from the older definition of media and are channels that target recipients with the conveying of messages in shaping opinions or achieving specific effects. Electronic media refers to a broad range of electrically controlled technologies, including digital recordings, video and audio, slideshows, CD-ROMs, online content, as well as television, radio, telephones, and computer-based media. (Chandler & Munday, 2011). These technologies have transformed the world by reshaping the learning environment for children. Consequently, the development and learning of young children today have changed from what psychologists have studied before. The critical role of media in regulating the environment has prompted researchers to study its impact on child development. Many technological changes in the education industry enable various electronic media to be available as supporting materials or technology support for preschool activities.

According to Erik Erikson's psychosocial stages of development, early childhood is characterized by the development of autonomy and initiative which are crucial for later emotional and social competence (Bishop, 2013). Media influence theories such as the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) and the Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz et al., 1973) provide frameworks for understanding how media content affects behaviour and emotional responses. Social Learning Theory suggests children learn behaviours and emotional responses by observing and imitating media content. At the same time, the Uses and Gratifications Theory emphasises how individuals actively select media that satisfy their needs and influence their development.

Researchers have sought to determine whether the overuse of communication tools leads to socio-emotional problems in children. A study conducted in Korea by Seo et al. (2011) found that high levels of computer use are associated with lower scores in socio-emotional development. Similarly, they noted that children who spend excessive time watching television tend to perform poorly on socio-emotional assessments. Teychenne et al. (2012) suggest that there may be an association between childhood physical activity and electronic media use, both of which can influence psychosocial health. When communication tools disrupt psychosocial development, children may experience difficulties in essential communication skills, such as reading facial expressions and building relationships (Akyar & Sapsaglam, 2019). Moreover, young children's exposure to electronic media poses risks, including dangerous encounters with strangers and potential exposure to inappropriate content, such as pornography. Conversely, digital communication tools are also reshaping children's consumption behaviours (Akyar & Sapsaglam, 2019). Keinonen et al. (2014) assert

that media serve as a critical source of information, influencing individuals' knowledge and behaviours that, in turn, shape children's consumption habits and impact family spending (Lindstrom & Seybold, 2003).

Excessive screen time can significantly reduce opportunities for face-to-face social interactions, which are crucial for developing social skills. Studies indicate that children who engage in more screen time may experience delays in social and emotional development, including difficulties in understanding non-verbal cues and interacting with peers (Christakis et al., 2009; Gou & Perceval, 2023). Furthermore, excessive media exposure, particularly to violent or overstimulating content, can lead to challenges in emotional regulation and increased aggression. Children with high screen time may exhibit impulsive behaviours and struggle to manage frustration and anxiety (Zoromba et al., 2023).

In the context of Sri Lanka, media usage patterns among preschool children are shaped by both global and local content. While there are educational programmes available in Sinhala and Tamil languages, access to high-quality and culturally relevant media content remains limited, especially in rural areas (Silva, 2024). This disparity can significantly affect the developmental experiences of preschool children.

On a more positive note, electronic media that feature positive social interactions and emotional narratives can aid children in understanding and managing their emotions. Programmes that model empathy, cooperation, and problem-solving can contribute to the development of social skills and emotional intelligence (Kirkorian et al., 2008). Additionally, co-viewing and interactive media experiences can enhance parental involvement in children’s

learning processes. Research suggests that when parents engage in educational media alongside their children, it fosters discussions about content, reinforces learning, and strengthens the parent-child bond (Scott, 2022; Zaman et al., 2016).

The existing literature indicates that electronic media has the potential to influence the socio-emotional development of preschool children in both positive and negative ways. While the benefits associated with educational content and parental involvement are evident, significant concerns remain regarding social interaction, emotional regulation, and cultural adaptation. In the Sri Lankan context, these effects may be further influenced by unique socio-cultural dynamics and disparities in access to media resources.

Despite the increasing presence of electronic media, empirical research specifically examining its impact on the socio-emotional development of Sri Lankan preschool children is limited. Nonetheless, studies have highlighted the risks associated with excessive screen use, along with potential interventions (Rohanachandra, 2023). There remains a critical gap in understanding how electronic media affects children's emotional management, social interactions, and a sense of self within the cultural framework of Sri Lanka. This issue is further complicated by disparities in access to high-quality media content which can vary significantly between urban and rural areas and across socio-economic groups. Such disparities may exacerbate educational and developmental inequalities, particularly affecting the socio-emotional well-being of children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Methodology

The present study employed a survey design to gather data on parents' perceptions regarding the impact of electronic media on their children's socio-emotional development. These perceptions are valuable for understanding parents' awareness, attitudes, and beliefs about electronic media. Moreover, parental perceptions can significantly influence child-rearing practices which in turn may affect preschool children's exposure to media.

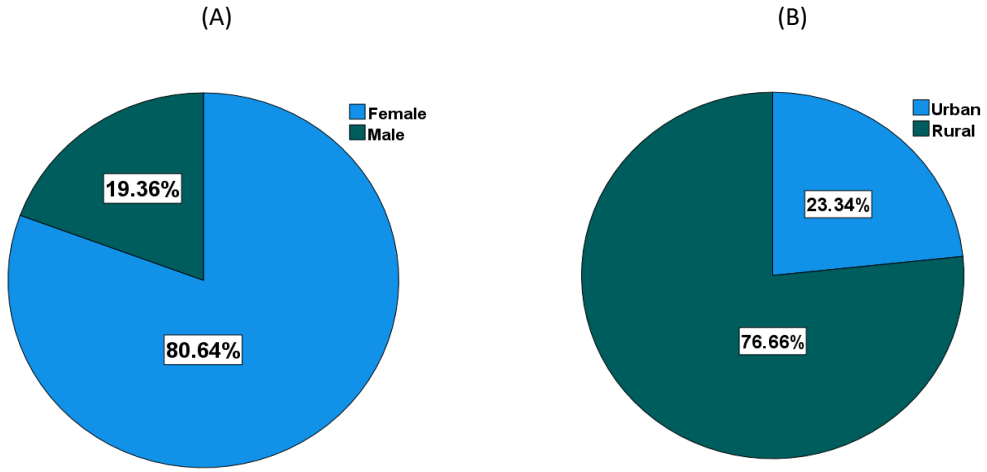
The sample participated in the study was parents of young children attending preschool in the Kalutara District of the Western Province. In the Kalutara District, there are 1,045 preschools with a total of 27,041 children between the ages of 3 and 5. Of these, only 763 preschools were officially registered with the Provincial Council responsible for preschool education. Thomas (1996) emphasizes the importance of clearly defining the target population and ensuring that the chosen sample is representative of it. The size of the parental sample was determined as 377 parents who were selected at random (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

The sample comprised 80.64% females and 19.36% males (Figure 1A). The higher female participation can be attributed to the fact that, in the Sri Lankan context, mothers are predominantly responsible for the early education of young children. The sample covers both rural (76.66) and urban (23.34%) sectors in Sri Lanka (Figure 1 B). In Sri Lanka, the urban-rural classification delineates geographic area, with urban areas governed by Municipal Councils and Urban Councils, while rural areas fall under the authority of Pradeshiya Sabhas

(Department of Census and Statistics, 2012). The urban and rural distributions of parents in a sample population reflect the country's general trend in population distribution (Ritchie & Roser, 2018).

Figure 1

Distribution of Respondents by Gender (A) and Sector (B)



The participants' educational qualifications were summarized and presented in Table 1 indicating that most respondents possessed G C E (A/L) qualification (45.62%), and lower percentages were observed for the G C E (O/L), secondary level of education and primary education by 18.83%, 6.37% and 3.18% respectively (Figure 2). Further, the participants with graduate and postgraduate degrees represented 15.38% and 10.61%. In addition, the distribution of professions among the sample population is illustrated in Table 1. According to the table, it is apparent that the participants are heterogeneous concerning their profession. However, it is worth noting that unemployed participants represent 25.7% of the sample. Meanwhile, professionals (15.4%) and clerical support workers (14.1 %) represent a considerable faction of the parent sample.

In the same way, the educational qualifications of the participants mirror the overall educational patterns of the country (UNESCO- Institute for Statistics, 2023). Most rural women in Sri Lanka are not a part of the workforce, leading to a significant proportion of unemployed parents in the survey (Samarakoon & Mayadunne, 2018). Generally, most men tend to be less involved in child-rearing, especially with younger children, leaving women with the primary responsibility (Boserup et al., 2013). This could be attributed to the fact that most men were employed and thus had limited availability to participate in activities related to preschool-aged children.

Figure 2

Distribution of Respondents by Educational Qualifications

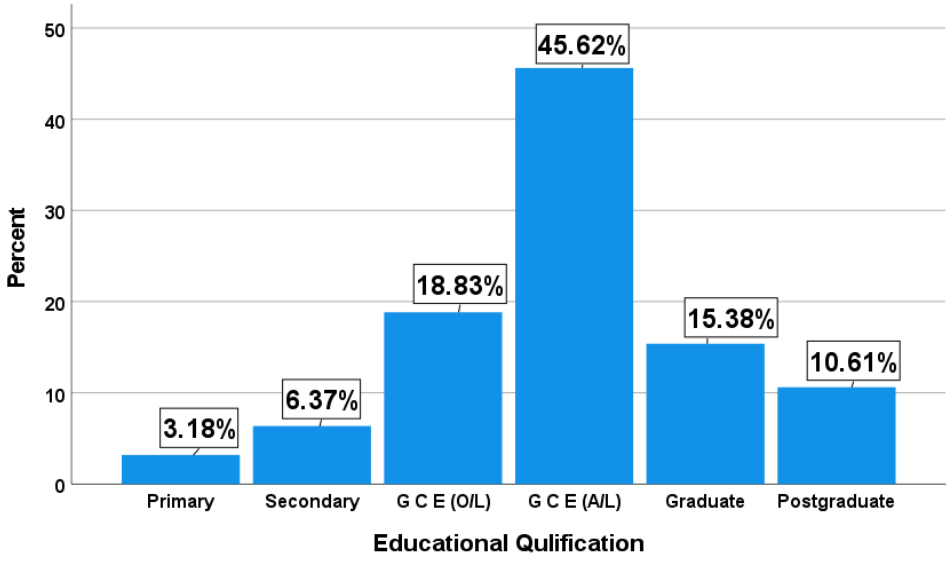


Table 1

Frequency Distribution of Respondents by Profession

Profession	Frequency	Percent
Manager	24	6.4
Professional	58	15.4
Technicians and associated professionals	22	5.8
Clerical support workers	53	14.1
Service and sales workers	29	7.7
Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers	12	3.2
Craft-related trades workers	26	6.9
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	29	7.7
Elementary occupations	17	4.5
Armed forces	10	2.7
Unemployed	97	25.7
Total	377	100

The data collection instrument was a pretested and validated parent questionnaire comprising eight (8) indicators rated on a 5-point Likert scale and an open-ended question. Along with this, the questionnaire collected demographic details of the parents. A total of 55 randomly chosen participants completed the pilot survey. The responses were then cross-checked for

correlation between the indicators, revealing a statistically significant correlation ($p < 0.05$) among the indicators in the socio-emotional domain. The internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha test for pilot data, showing an overall Alpha value of 0.831, surpassing the accepted value of 0.7 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). After translation, the questionnaire was converted into Google Forms and distributed among the selected parents of the study. The descriptions and codes (D: Demographic, SEM: Social and Emotional) used in analysing data are presented in Table 2. The participants provided informed consent, and the information received from the participants was confidential. To ensure participant confidentiality, all data were anonymized and stored securely. Efforts were made to include a diverse sample, but regional and socio-economic representation limitations may still exist. Further, data from surveys may be subject to self-reporting bias.

Data were preprocessed and missing and neutral responses were removed from the data set. Subsequently, ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’ responses were merged as ‘agree’, while ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘disagree’ responses were combined and represented as ‘disagree’. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution and graphic presentations were used to summarize media usage patterns and socio-emotional development indicators. Statistical tests examined relationships between parents' perceived media usage by preschoolers and socio-emotional status. Differences between urban and rural settings and gender were analyzed using the χ^2 test. The relationship between the parents' responses and their educational qualifications and profession was assessed through the Kruskal-Wallis test.

Table 2

Indicators by description

Item	Description
Demographics	
D1	Sector
D2	Gender of the respondent
D3	Educational qualifications
D4	Profession
Activities	
TV	Programmes the child likes to watch
Computer	Purpose of using these devices (activities using the devices)
Smartphone	Purpose of using the smartphone (activities using the smartphone)
Aspect of socio-emotional (SEM) behaviour promoted through electronic media	
SEM1	Prosocial behaviour (helping others, shouldering responsibilities, etc.)
SEM2	Aggressive/violent behaviours
SEM3	Good manners
Perceptions	
SEM4	Undesirable behaviours (temper tantrums)
SEM5	Excessive use of electronic media (TV, computer or smartphone) prevents children from forming healthy relationships with adults and peers
SEM6	Electronic media, especially games, promote unhealthy competition among children
SEM7	Electronic media functions as entertainment for most children since parents do not have time to play with them or take them out
SEM8	Children become addicted to electronic media
Screen time	
TV	Screen time on TV
Computer	Screen time on the computer
Smartphone	Screen time on the smartphone
OE – Open ended	Additional comments

Results and Discussion

Data presented in Table 3 reveal that parents have expressed mixed views on the impact of electronic media on preschool children's social and emotional development.

Table 3

Summary of the Parents' Responses to Items and their Impact on the Child's Socio-emotional Development

Item	Response	Frequency	Per cent	Impact
SEM1	Disagree	52	25.2	Negative
	Agree	154	74.8	Positive
SEM2	Disagree	44	17.5	Positive
	Agree	208	82.5	Negative
SEM3	Disagree	50	25.9	Negative
	Agree	143	74.1	Positive
SEM4	Disagree	58	25.2	Negative
	Agree	172	74.8	Positive
SEM5	Disagree	46	16.1	Positive
	Agree	239	83.9	Negative
SEM6	Disagree	67	26.5	Positive
	Agree	186	73.5	Negative
SEM7	Disagree	56	20.0	Negative
	Agree	224	80.0	Positive
SEM8	Disagree	39	11.9	Positive
	Agree	290	88.1	Negative

Parents' ratings of the statement that children learn prosocial behaviours (e.g., helping others, shouldering responsibilities) through electronic media indicated that 40.9% agree or strongly agree, while 13.8% disagree. Conversely, 55.2% of parents agree or strongly agree that children learn aggressive or violent behaviours from electronic media (SEM 2). A significant body of research highlights the negative impact of electronic media on children's behaviour (Huesmann, 2007; Iqbal, 2020; Khan et al., 2022), though several other studies emphasize its positive effects (Erreygers et al., 2017; Ventouris, 2021). These conflicting research findings reflect the mixed perceptions held by Sri Lankan's parents.

Similarly, contradictory views emerged regarding whether children learn good manners from electronic media and whether media consumption encourages temper tantrums. Notably, 38.0% of parents agree or strongly agree that children learn good manners from media, while 40.7% believe media facilitates temper tantrums. Although home remains the primary environment for children to learn manners, parents acknowledge that TV programmes such as "Sesame Street" and the Sri Lankan programme "Sellam Midula" can support positive behaviour development.

Conversely, electronic media, especially mobile phones, can contribute to problematic behaviour. Research by Radesky et al. (2016) suggests that parents often use mobile technology to manage their children's difficult emotions. For instance, parents may give their child a phone to calm them during a temper tantrum (Coyne et al., 2021). Thus, while electronic media can foster positive behaviours, this study identifies a considerable proportion of parents who recognize its potential for misuse, underscoring the importance of promoting wise media use.

This study also found that a majority of parents (63.4%) believe excessive use of electronic media (e.g., TV, computers, smartphones) hinders children's ability to form healthy relationships with adults and peers. Additionally, 49.3% of parents agree that electronic media, particularly games, foster unhealthy competition among children. According to Bikham and Rich (2006), exposure to violent (but not nonviolent) programmes is negatively associated with time spent socializing with friends in children aged 6-8, illustrating the potential impact of media on social relationships. While research on competitive electronic games has focused primarily on their influence on aggression, there is a scarcity of studies examining how excessive engagement in these games promotes competition among children. Given the significant parental agreement on this issue, further research is warranted to explore its effects.

Most parents (59.4%) agree or strongly agree that electronic media serve as entertainment for children, especially since many parents lack the time to engage in play or outdoor activities with them. This study revealed that 22.3% of Sri Lankan preschool children use electronic media for entertainment, while a significant majority (76.9%) also agree or strongly agree that children become addicted to electronic media. The findings suggest that parents are aware of the risks associated with excessive screen time, echoing research that links prolonged internet use to internet addiction.

Further to their responses to the Likert type questions, parents expressed various views on the influence of electronic media on their children's socio-emotional development, such as:

- Children's behaviours and activities change based on the programmes they watch; parents must select appropriate content.

- Proper training in the use of electronic media is necessary.
- Parental presence during media use is essential.
- Children must be taught to distinguish between good and bad content.
- Media can have both positive and negative effects as children adopt both good and bad habits.
- Electronic media use requires structured guidelines.
- Under parental supervision, media can be beneficial.
- Parental supervision can prevent negative influences and addiction.
- Children lacking parental attention are more likely to become addicted to TV.
- Children learn by imitating characters they see on TV.

These views indicate that most parents are aware of both the beneficial and adverse effects of electronic media. Supportive measures, including government regulations, are needed to help parents manage their children's media consumption effectively.

Table 4 compares parents' responses across items in the socio-emotional domain regarding preschool children's screen time on television, computers, and smartphones.

Table 4

Comparison of the Socio-emotional Domain Items by Parents' Reported Screen Time (High and Low Exposure) on TV, Computer and Smartphones (χ^2 test)

Item	Television	Sig.	Computers	Sig.	Smartphone	Sig.
SEM1	4383.5	0.126	4222.5	0.695	3287.0	0.001
SEM2	6019.5	0.076	5196.0	0.005	6114.0	0.674
SEM3	3983.0	0.220	3681.0	0.167	3559.0	0.463
SEM4	5085.0	0.019	4370.0	0.061	5062.5	0.380
SEM5	7927.5	0.030	5979.0	0.003	7229.0	0.137
SEM6	6564.0	0.389	4586.0	0.007	5599.0	0.143
SEM7	7972.0	0.275	6732.0	0.237	6424.0	0.010
SEM8	11344.5	0.511	7094.5	0.000	9587.5	0.197

According to Table 4, parents' responses to the items on the screen time indicated significant differences in the parents' reported screen time on television for the items SEM4 (χ^2 =5085.0, p = 0.019 and SEM5 (χ^2 = 7927.5, p = 0.030). Meanwhile, the responses to SEM2 (χ^2 =5196.0, p = 0.005), SEM5 (χ^2 = 5979.0, p = 0.003), SEM6 (χ^2 = 4586.0, p = 0.007), SEM8 χ^2 = 7094.5, p = 0.000). Of the items related to the screen time of the Smartphone, two items, SEM1 (χ^2 = =3287.0, p = 0.001, SEMO7 (χ^2 = 6424.0, p = 0.010), were significantly varied across the types of media. This discrepancy could be attributed to the respondents' demographics under consideration. Parents utilize mobile technology to manage challenging emotions (Radesky et al., 2016). For instance, when a child is irritable, parents often give them a phone to calm him down (Coyne et al., 2021). The present study reveals that a significant portion of parents are aware of this, which could enable them to make more informed decisions about the use of electronic media.

The types of electronic media parents perceive as beneficial or detrimental to children's social and emotional development were identified by comparing parents' reported ratings on the screen time spent on each type (Table 5).

Table 5

Comparison of the Socio-emotional Domain Items Reported by Parents (High and Low Exposure) on Programmes on TV and Activities on Computers and Smartphones (χ^2 test)

Item	TV programs	Sig.	Activities on computer	Sig.	Activities on smartphone activity	Sig.
SEM1	29.8	0.000	4.3	0.502	20.9	0.001
SEM2	61.8	0.000	19.8	0.001	10.6	0.060
SEM3	32.7	0.000	1.8	0.878	11.0	0.050
SEM4	23.5	0.005	7.5	0.187	13.5	0.019
SEM5	36.1	0.000	8.4	0.136	26.9	0.000
SEM6	26.5	0.002	8.4	0.135	10.1	0.074
SEM7	39.3	0.000	27.5	0.000	8.5	0.131
SEM8	51.6	0.000	22.9	0.000	35.6	0.000

The comparison of the parents' reported ratings illustrated in Table 5 indicates that almost all the items considered under the socio-emotional domain varied significantly ($p < 0.05$). Further, the parents' rating of the items related to computer activities, such as SEM2 (19.8, $p = 0.001$), SEM7 (27.5, $p = 0.000$), SEM8 (22.9, $p = 0.000$) indicated a statistically significant difference. Activities on smartphone activity, according to the parents' ratings SEM1 (20.9, $p = 0.001$), SEM3 (11.0, $p = 0.050$), SEM4 (13.5, $p = 0.019$), and SEM5 (26.9, $p = 0.000$), varied

significantly. These findings reveal that most parents know that their kids spend time on TV programmes and it affects them adversely. According to Bikham and Rich (2006), spending time with friends while a youngster is between six and eight is inversely correlated with watching violent television (but not peaceful television). This research has shown how electronic media can impact social ties. Many parents' responses seem to support this remark, and further research is required to determine its impact.

Table 6 illustrates the results of the chi-square test conducted to identify whether there is a significant difference between parents' demographic characteristics (sector, gender, educational qualifications and profession) and their perceptions on the impact of electronic media on children's socio-emotional development.

Table 6

Comparison of Parents' Responses by Sector and Gender and Educational Qualifications

(χ^2 test)

Item	Sector	Sig.	Gender	Sig.	Educational qualification	Sig.	Professional qualification	Sig.
SEM1	4365.0	0.959	3060.0	0.056	7.94	0.160	15.2	0.085
SEM2	4773.5	0.000	3734.0	0.001	12.22	0.032	10.9	0.286
SEM3	3306.0	0.047	3276.5	0.677	5.24	0.387	2.30	0.986
SEM4	4753.0	0.100	3082.5	0.002	7.02	0.219	10.2	0.331
SEM5	6279.0	0.006	5199.0	0.003	22.35	0.000	13.9	0.125
SEM6	4962.0	0.012	4265.0	0.096	4.97	0.419	19.4	0.022
SEM7	6831.5	0.268	4747.5	0.003	13.64	0.018	24.5	0.004
SEM8	8026.5	0.000	6937.0	0.002	8.30	0.140	14.3	0.112

Comparatively, SEM2, SEM3, SEM5, SEM6, and SEM8 differ significantly across the sector ($p < 0.05$) while responses to the items SEM2, SEM4, SEM5, SEM7 and SEM8 indicated a significant difference between the genders ($p < 0.05$). The parents' educational qualifications indicated negligible differences in their responses; however, responses to the items SEM2, SEM5, and SEM7 showed significant differences (Table 6). In summary, a comparison of the responses across the sector, gender and educational qualifications imply that the respondents' demographic backgrounds have a certain influence on the responses. There was an array of research on the adverse effects of electronic media on children's behaviours (Iqbal, 2020; Kahn et al., 2022) as well as research that highlights its positive effects (Erreygers et al., 2017; Ventouris, 2021;) and these researches support the conflicting views of Sri Lankan parents.

Conclusions

This study found that parents are well aware of both the positive and negative impacts of electronic media on their children's socio-emotional development. Overall, most parents hold a positive attitude toward electronic media, believing that it helps foster prosocial behaviour, teaches good manners and aids in managing temper tantrums. Additionally, parents recognize that electronic media provides valuable entertainment for children, particularly when they are unable to spend time with them. It was also noted that a majority of parents are also aware that electronic media promotes negative behaviours such as aggressiveness.

The study also found that parents' perceptions of the impact of electronic media on their children's socio-emotional development vary according to sector, gender, educational qualification, and profession. In general, parents' perceptions of the effects of electronic

media on their preschool children's socio-emotional development reflect a nuanced understanding shaped by their diverse demographic backgrounds.

Recommendations

The study underscores the importance of guiding parents to strike a balance between leveraging the benefits of electronic media and limiting its potential harm to ensure healthy socio-emotional development in their children.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to enhance the socio-emotional development of preschool children while promoting healthy media habits among parents and educators:

1. Encourage balanced media usage:

It is essential to promote a balanced approach to media consumption among preschool children. This involves integrating high-quality educational content with opportunities for active play and social interactions. Such a balanced approach can support healthy socio-emotional development, enabling children to engage with media in a way that complements their growth and learning.

2. Provide resources and guidelines:

Equipping parents and educators with accessible resources and clear guidelines for effective media usage is crucial. These resources should aim to mitigate the negative impacts of

electronic media while enhancing its educational value. By offering practical strategies and best practices, parents and educators can make informed decisions that align with the developmental needs of preschool children.

3. Emphasize cultural relevance in media content:

This study underscores the significance of balancing media usage with other developmental activities. Additionally, it highlights the necessity for culturally relevant media content that resonates with the experiences and values of families in Sri Lanka. Developing media that reflects the cultural context can enhance children's understanding of their environment and foster a sense of belonging.

4. Offer awareness raising programmes for parents:

Providing awareness-raising programmes and resources for parents on managing screen time, selecting age-appropriate content and engaging in co-viewing activities can significantly benefit children's media experiences. Such programmes can empower parents to make informed decisions regarding media consumption and encourage them to reinforce positive experiences through shared viewing and discussions.

5. Foster healthy media habits:

Parents should be encouraged to foster healthy media habits themselves. Engaging in interactive activities that do not involve screens, such as reading together, playing board games, or participating in outdoor activities, can foster meaningful interactions and promote the development of social skills. By prioritizing non-screen activities, parents can create a balanced environment that supports their children's overall development.

These findings provide the baseline information on the impact of electronic media on the socio-emotional development of preschool children to teachers, professionals and policy-makers for preparation of guidelines in the future for fostering a holistic approach to media usage, ensuring that preschool children benefit from educational content while also engaging in enriching activities that support their socio-emotional growth.

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