

Investigation of web pages that share information about children in early childhood*

Servet KARDEŞ¹   Berrin AKMAN²   Necdet TAŞKIN³  

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Introduction

The Internet is one of the most important tools used to reach information in today's information society. According to the statistics of 2019, 57% of the world population is internet user and 45% of the world population is social media user (Digital in, 2019). The Internet is an effective communication channel for reaching detailed information at low cost, reaching large masses and providing interaction between individuals. The number of websites that are prepared for various purposes on the internet and appealing to different target audiences is rapidly increasing. Therefore, the number of websites in education has increased rapidly as in other fields. In recent years, the number of websites sharing information about the development and education of children in early childhood has been increasing. While most of these web pages are set up for commercial purposes, some web sites appear to belong to foundations or government agencies.

Internet and media technologies, smartphones and tablets are increasingly being used in early childhood education. Since internet and technology are used so much in early childhood education, the question to be asked is; how internet and social media content can help children learn and develop. It emerged in discussions about the effects of the Internet and social media content on the development of children in early childhood. In some researches (Clarke & Svanaes, 2014; Heafner, 2004; Parette, Quesenberry & Blum, 2010; Plowman, Stevenson, Stephen & McPake, 2012) erken çocukluk döneminde sosyal medya içeriklerinin ve internet teknolojisinin faydaları anlatılırken, araştırmaların çoğunda (Clark, 1994; Cornelius & Boss, 2003; Li, 2006; Lindahl & Folkesson, 2012; Radesky, Schumacher & Zuckerman, 2015; Salomon, 1997; Scott & O'Sullivan, 2000; Tsitouridou & Vryzas, 2004) researchers focuses on the damages of media use. However, it is stated that limited and controlled media usage of children over 2 years is acceptable (Radesky et al., 2015).

Interactive devices such as smartphones and tablets and the use of the Internet are common among children, and often parents can use these tools unconsciously as a means of behavior regulation for their children. These devices and the use of the Internet may have a negative impact on the social emotional development and communication skills of the children in the long term, even if they produce solutions in the short term (Scott & O'Sullivan, 2000). Another danger is the Internet-based applications for children in early childhood that claim to be safe and suitable for children without any evidence-based researches. Parents can leave their children alone for hours on the screen, considering that these applications are educational and suitable for the development of their children. This poses risks to the healthy development of children. Researches reveals that children acquire self-regulation, empathy, social skills, emotion regulation, and problem-solving skills by exploring their's environments, interacting with adults, and gaining skills with unstructured games. Therefore, it can be foreseen that uncontrolled time on the screen will involve developmental problems and delays for children (Radesky et al., 2015).

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Purpose

Increasing use of the Internet and even internet addiction between parents and teachers and the use of social media networks lead adults to obtain most of the information about the child's development from websites and social media networks. With the development of technology and intensive use of the internet and social media networks, some measures have been taken in this field. For example, in 2007, public institutions website guide was published and information was given about how the websites should be and the structure of its content. In addition to this, there are many non-governmental websites that share information about the development and education of the child. Establishment of these sites in an uncontrolled manner without adherence to any quality standards and sharing information about childhood poses some risks. In particular, when parents are not digitally literate, they can adapt the information to the child's education process without filtering them.

In this study, it is aimed to examine the content of websites which sharing information about early childhood. The originality of this research is the lack of previous research on the quality of web pages and information quality in the early childhood education. Examining the websites that share information about childhood and revealing their quality will cause researchers to see the applications and deficiencies in this field. Additionally, this research is expected to be a resource for policy-makers.

Method

This research is designed as a case study which is one of the qualitative research methods. The study group consists of 13 web pages and websites managers who share information for children in early childhood. The selection of the sites analyzed in the research consists of the websites that result from the use of the keywords “preschool”, “preschool education” and “early childhood education” In the research, semi-structured interview form was used as data collection from website managers. The checklist created in accordance with expert opinions and the literature review of used to examine the websites. Descriptive analysis technique was used for the analysis of the web sites and interviews with the managers.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

In our research, it was concluded that the information reliability of the websites established for commercial purposes is not sufficient. Kurbanoglu (2009) stated that accuracy and reliability are important criteria for the evaluation of websites. Therefore, the sites that share information about early childhood are expected to share accurate and reliable information. Esgin, Baba, Aytaç and Turan (2011) concluded that the awareness of participants about the accuracy and reliability of internet resources was insufficient. This situation has risks for individuals to access and transfer healthy and accurate information.

As a result, it is seen that there is a wealth of information in web pages in general, information reliability is not sufficient in web pages established for commercial purposes, public access is provided to everyone except commercial sites, contents are not generally innovative and webpages don't give importance of information update. Website's managers stated that users should be informed, content should be under expert control before publication and citation should be done.