
PROSPECTS OF MEDIA EDUCATION: CHILDREN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH MEDIA LITERACY BY THE PARENTS

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ABSTRACT

Media not only in Pakistan but all over the world have become the most influential and dominant source of information and entertainment. With the growing number of electronic gadgets, the device usage has been an indispensable component of these digitally aged children without which they feel their lives incomplete. The vast majority of children spend the significant amount of time using media devices in order to gratify their social needs and to gain information and entertainment, but its impact on young children is certainly undeniable. In relation to this context, the role of parents would be considered highly important in monitoring their children media-related activities. The in-depth interviews from parents of children aged between 8-13 years from Islamabad were conducted to understand their perceptions regarding the media related activities of their children, their mediation strategies, their key concerns, their awareness of media literacy, its significance value for children and their willingness to implement media literacy in educational curriculum for their children empowerment. The key finding indicates that advocating for initiation and implementation of media literacy education will be beneficial and enhance critical thinking skills among children to understand and evaluate media content and messages. Empowering children through media literacy education can address the

major serious concerns of parents because restriction or limitation of children media usage is no longer effective. Hence, this study suggests that the engagement and active participation of children with these devices should be encouraged in a productive style. This study proposes that a high level of parental monitoring occurs when children use devices. Parents should monitor their children device usage. This recommends that parents need to have discussions with their children regarding their media related activities, because they are always worried about their children media usage both in school and at in home.

KEYWORDS

Media literacy, Pakistan, children, parents

INTRODUCTION

The advances in the information and communication technologies have brought profound changes in the world. These rapid and incredible developments have not only transformed people's lives but also have great influence on their thoughts and opinions. This is widely apparent that vast majority of children having access to media technologies independently and generally without close monitoring. Majority of the parents offer a media environment to their kids with little or no guidance. Mostly parents have not much time to spend with their children and find it difficult to monitor their children's media related activities. As a result, this leads to a decrease in parent-child conversation. The lack of enough monitoring develops more trust of children on media. The findings of previous literature urged to develop more parent-child interaction regarding media related activities as an effective way to alter the influence of media exposure on children's personality (Chakroff & Nathanson, 2008). It has become important now days to have parental mediation on regular basis for the better understanding of the contemporary media encounter by children

In recent years children have been engaged with different forms of media at home. Home is considered to be the most common place for device usage among children that is followed closely by school and friend's house (Lenhart, Madden, & Hitlin, 2005). In relation to this context, the role of parents would be considered highly important in monitoring their children media-related activities. Parents are considered as the role model for children at home. Therefore, parental guidance is essential for children not to be misused by the screen images. Hence, parents serve as the "primary gatekeeper" for children's exposure to media content in homes. Throughout their lives, parents play major role in helping and making "meaningful choices" regarding device use among children and anticipating the impacts of those choices. Hence, the key aspect of this study is to examine children's media practices on regular basis along with perceptions of their parents regarding media literacy for their empowerment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Majority parents, teachers, media literacy organizations and government policy-makers in the world were concerned regarding exposure of kids and teenagers to the available media content. The rising accessibility of the low-quality media content presented “violence, sexual content, undesirable role models and lack of diversity” and short- and long-term influence of these materials on children’s physical and mental health were the major concerns shown by the parents. Parents being working found it difficult to monitor their children media related activities. As a result, children easily got attracted to the entertaining programs and content therefore, efforts must be made to encourage the positive potential of the global media which is bringing real changes in children’s lives “by informing them, listening to them and ultimately empowering them” (Gigli, 2004). Majority parents are concerned regarding the influence of smart phones on children that caused health problems, isolation from society, loneliness, radiation exposure, and the children usage of technology without taking any proper measures (Genc, 2014). Although young children being immature unable to protect themselves online but still children had been increasingly confident regarding Internet usage. Parents either underestimate or did not realize how often children and young people came across potentially unsafe and inappropriate content on the internet and were often unsure about what they would do about it (Byron, 2008).

Vittrup, Snider, Rose, and Rippy (2016) found the positive attitude of parents regarding their children media usage. Parents believed that media technology was considered to be an important part of their children’s lives. Therefore, parents allowed their children to have private access towards using technology as they assumed their children would become more knowledgeable, “technologically savvy” and capable to easily consume these technologies without any fear and problem. With this constant exposure without knowing the consequences children tried to imitate whatever they observe on media. Therefore, parents were more responsible to pay more care and consideration towards children’s proper education and training in order to prevent them from the harmful consequences of media (Fatima & Ashfaq, 2014). Similarly, Wang (2005) maintained that the exposure of children towards violence depicted in the television news had been a major concern for parents. As parents believed cartoons to be less violent than the television news therefore, they mostly allowed their children to watch more cartoons than television news.

Today children were empowered with different skills to interpret, understand, and create messages and “creating substitutions to current videogames” (Pavlova, 2005). Parents showed great concern regarding violence present in the video games that developed fear among children and cause harmful impact on their personality (Gong & Piller, 2018). Dietz (1998) maintained that (80%) computer games contained violence and aggression. Moreover, violent video games exaggerated aggressive

behavior among children (Anderson & Bushman, 2001). Similarly, Gentile (2008) found the growing popularity of video games among children. Videogames (91%) were rated as inappropriate for 10 years old children as these games had violent content, as well as (31%) of games for younger children. In the 21st century games have been rapidly gaining importance and popularity as an “important cultural form” and therefore, developed more anxieties such as violence, “addiction and the cultural value of games”. These electronic games and Internet had blur children’s minds. They are unaware to discern between real life and recreation “virtual reality”. In addition, children might become insensitive to actions performed in man-made and virtual worlds, such as violence, aggressions, and killing (Subrahmanyam, Greenfield, Kraut, & Gross, 2001). Children’s social development and learning could be affected by unsafe and unconscious usage of Internet. While working on the Internet, children might come across many risks including “stranger danger”, cyber-bullying and ‘sexting” (Livingstone, Kirwil, Ponte, & Staksrud, 2014). Children being vulnerable to strangers or predators therefore, it is imperative to monitor children behaviors while online (Dowell, Burgess, & Cavanaugh, 2009). It became imperative to educate children about the risks with the help of supervising and guidance (Anastasiades & Vitalaki, 2011). In this context, parents and schools could play an important role in enhancing children’s awareness regarding Internet safety (Sampasa-Kanyinga, Raumeliotis, & Xu, 2014).

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. How do parents perceive the media usage of their children, and how much parents are willing to introduce children media literacy at primary school level in Islamabad?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, the in-depth interviews were carried out from the parents to understand their perceptions regarding the media related activities of their children, their mediation strategies, their key concerns, their awareness of media literacy, its significance value for children and their willingness to implement media literacy in educational curriculum for their children empowerment. The researcher selected the questions for the interview more carefully to obtain greater response and not only limit the participants’ reactions to the questions. Both Sensitive nature and biased questions were avoided in the interview so that participants feel confident while answering in a friendly environment and provide maximum information to the researcher. The only yardstick for selection of parents was that the either be a father or mother of a child aged between 8-13 years of age. Voluntarily 18 parents were selected from Islamabad.

Firstly, the interview started with the demographic questions followed by the introduction part that included the study purpose, their interview importance to the study, privacy of their identity and responses, how to use their responses, and

significance of answering all questions asked in the interview process. The interview included around six demographic questions and more or less thirteen open-ended questions depending on the session. The interview starts with the parents' demographics information such as age and gender, age of child or children, level of education, their profession. Following questions were asked related to the media environment, usage of different forms of media devices by their children and the major concerns of parents, their mediation styles and suggestions. The last questions deal with the information regarding their own awareness of media literacy, its significance value for children, followed by the questions related to their readiness for the implementation of media literacy in the educational program for their children empowerment. Parents did not find it convenient to give face-to-face interview thus; telephonic interviews were conducted with them. From volunteers, eighteen parents were purposefully chosen. The average duration of the interview lasted for about 15-20 minutes. As it was difficult for the parents to come for the interview so for their ease telephonic interviews were taken. With the consent of the parents, the researcher took notes during the interview and was not permitted for voice recording.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The demographics information of parents revealed that mostly parents are well educated and they were between 32-41 years of age. Mostly mothers participated in the interview. After inquiring basic demographics, questions were asked to parents to list what media devices children were personally engaged with at home. All parents mentioned the availability of diverse forms of media devices such as television/LED, computer, Internet, smart phone, tablet, iPad, laptop, and game machines (play station, Xbox) at home. Almost all children have at least one TV, have at least one computer, and have a laptop or tablet in their homes. Nearly three-fourths of parents have one or more smartphones. The most frequent response given was that parents observed children using TV, Internet and mobile phone daily. This shows the great proportion of children with home access to various devices increased considerably. The parents said:

"My house is equipped with almost all the technology such as LED, computer, Internet, smart phone, and tablet. My children use these devices on regular basis" (P6)

"In my home I have TV, mobile phone and iPad. My children use these devices on daily basis" (P2)

The parents' responses revealed that children started using media devices from the early age. Children between the age group of 2-6 started watching TV, playing games on mobile phone and computer. Children being very young started listening to poems and songs on TV, watching cartoons, using iPad, and smart phone, playing different games on mobile phone and computer. Mostly children start watching cartoons even from six months of their age, and up to two years of their age they become regular

viewers of cartoons on television. The parents further revealed that children when reached the age of three years started using the mobile phone of their parents for listening poems, watching cartoons, and playing games. When children reach the age group of 4-5 years they started doing more activities on other devices like Internet, computer, and iPad. Parents revealed that mobile phone and TV has been found the most common used device among the young children of 3-6 years. The parents said: “My son started Internet earlier than his sister, when he was more than two years he started using Internet, whereas his sister started Internet when she was approximately three years old. My son whenever used the Internet he listened some poems and play online games. My daughter also plays online games on Internet” (P1)

“When any guest visit us and found that small child is using Internet, they also become worry and insists us don’t allow him to use this at this early age. He is just three years old and use Internet on his desktop computer, sometime plays games, and both sister and brother play together and sometimes they fight because of game or Internet.” (P10).

Parents were asked regarding the most frequent device usage among children at home. The largest group of parents responded that television/LED usage has dominated the lives of many children. Majority children leisure activities are based on device usage. According to them, children spend most of their free time in watching TV as compared to other devices. iPad and tablets are mostly used after getting free from the schoolwork. The usage of Internet and computer among children has also been increased. Children are more likely to use computer with Internet. Besides computer for Internet, children are using different other devices like mobile phone or tablet for Internet purposes. Children use iPad, tablet or laptop for performing different tasks such as playing games, listening songs or poems, download games, chatting with friends. Moreover, children enjoy playing games on game machines such as play station, and Xbox in the weekends. The parents said:

“After coming back from school, my daughter spends her majority time with computer and use Internet to play online games, whereas, my son sticks to the computer most of the time when he is at home and do some searching related to the topic of his interest” (P3)

“For my children iPad is the most frequently used device at home. They spend majority of the time with iPad for watching cartoons or sometime chat with their friends. They have many games downloaded in iPad.” (P7)

The parents’ replies identified that children access the media devices for different purposes. Mostly parents revealed that children use different media devices mainly for entertainment purpose. Children enjoy watching cartoons on television and computer along with different sorts of movies such as comedy and action movies. Children listen to music or songs on Internet and iPad. Children enjoy watching sports specially

football or cricket matches on TV. Downloading games is being the most common activity performed by children. Parents revealed that children download games, songs or movies from the Internet. The usage of mobile phone is mainly for the sake of entertainment such as chatting with their friends especially regarding homework and games. Usually children when get absent from school they talk to their friends on mobile phone to collect the homework or any relevant information related to classroom activities. Some parents mentioned that besides playing games, children are more likely to use mobile phone to make videos and taking photos. Moreover, parents also pointed out that different media devices have been used among children for Gaming purpose. Children easily get fascinated towards playing different sorts of games on TV, computer, tablet, iPad and mobile phone and sometimes on laptop. Children mostly use Internet to watch cartoons or to play games. Some children play online games on Internet. Additionally, children use Internet, computer or laptop for studying purpose. Internet is used for the sake of gaining information and knowledge among many children. Occasionally children use computer or Internet to collect relevant information for the completion of different assignments and projects given by the teacher. The parents said:

“My child likes to watch cartoons and fighting movies with his brother on TV and my daughter is interested in watching dramas and listening songs. She also likes to watch comedy movies whenever it is shown on TV. Therefore, it can be said that device usage among my children is mainly for the sake of entertainment” (P9)

“My daughter loves to play games on the computer. Whenever she is free she likes to play different games on the computer. My son is very fond of playing fighting or action games especially in weekends on computer” (P4)

The responses of the parents revealed that children spend almost 3 hours per day on watching TV, computer, Internet and other game machines. Moreover, children use smart phone, tablet or iPad for 2-3 hours on weekend. In weekends or long vacations the usage time has been increased from 3-4 hours per day. Parents while busy at work therefore, their children spend majority time with the device usage. Children engage in collecting information and spend 2 hours searching the relevant information from the Internet. However, very few parents mentioned their children using play station or playing video games for 4 hours a day. The data shows that the extreme usage of device among children was on weekends. The presence of computer or LED in the child's bedroom and access to the Internet has also increased in the recent years. The parents' responses specified that children use various media devices in different locations at home. Majority children use television/ LED at home in the lounge where the maximum time of the family is spent together. Likewise, majority children have Internet access at home so they don't need to go to other places for the Internet usage. Due to the Internet access at home parents permit their kids to use Internet for the sake of collecting more information in order to broad their knowledge. Some parents

revealed that as there is no Internet connection at home so children need to go to other places to connect to the Internet. For this purpose children mostly visit their relatives and friend's house where they can easily access to the Internet. Moreover, some parents also responded that children go to their neighbor friends to watch TV and play games on Xbox or play station. The Parents said:

"Sometimes because of searching the information on Internet my child takes almost 1-2 hours in collecting the required information. It takes more time to search for the information therefore; he spends more time on it. He sticks to the Internet until he gets the relevant information" (P3)

"When my child comes back from school he likes to use his iPad. He usually uses iPad for two hours. On my smart phone he also spends like 2 hours playing games" (P4)

Although many parents allow their kids to use these media devices but still they have concerns regarding technology-related issues their children face while online. Parents are worried about the effect of device usage on their children behavior. The parents maintained that the exposure of children to violent acts on TV makes the children aggressive and violent. The extreme access of various inappropriate programs on TV, Internet, and mobile phone affect children language and they get irritated more easily. Moreover, children's behavior, mannerism, language and way of talking are badly affected by watching cartoons, movies and playing video games. Some parents expressed great concern regarding loss of moral values and patience among children. What constitutes as inappropriate content for parents is mostly related to YouTube videos and other websites with content more suitable for adults, as well as TV advertisements. While watching such inappropriate programs, ads, or movies on TV, children get impatient. The unsuitable photographs on Internet, exposure to bad scenes and dressings appeared in cartoons have great influence on the personality of children. Concerns about the kind of content their children encounter are highest for online, television, advertisements and games. Such exposure to inappropriate content further develops pre-maturity among children especially at the young age. The parents said:

"My child behaves more aggressively after excessive watching cartoons on TV. My son gets angry more quickly and does not listen to me. He insists to do whatever he wants especially after watching cartoons for long hours" (P5)

"My child uses Internet and unconsciously comes across some naked photos of women which is not suitable for his age to watch. Sometimes, children watch the ads that are truly meant for adults. After watching those contents my son asks questions which I (as a parent) feel embarrass to answer him" (P11)

Parents are also concerned that their children are addict and much dependent on media. They expressed their concerns that their kids are more attached with media devices. As a result of this attachment with media devices, social skills are declining in their children. Among devices, children are more addicts to Television watching. Even these

kids are watching cartoons while having food and their parents believe that to feed them easily when they are busy in watching cartoons. Children spend several hours in front of TV, computer, iPad, tablet and smart phone and this addiction cause wastage of time. This long hour consumption of media devices by children greatly influences their studies. As children do not spend quality time with their studies this results in poor academic performance in school and it has been the growing concern among parents. The parents said:

“My son spends many hours in watching TV, using Internet and play games on computer. As a result his grades have been getting low and he also does not pay much attention to his studies. His mind always distracts him towards these electronic gadgets” (P3)

“My child focus of attention is much on these devices and he often discusses about iPad, mobile phone and games with his friends and pays not much attention to his studies. As a result he wastes most of his time on these devices and does not show good result in the class” (P5)

The parents expressed great concern regarding their children imitating behavior. Parents expressed that children try to copy the language, style, and actions from cartoons, movies, wrestling and games in their real lives. After watching cartoons or movies, children try to imitate the action of their favorite characters in real life that is considered harmful for them. Children try to copy the action of the players or wrestlers with their siblings that cause certain harmful consequences. One parent responded that he had witnessed copying an action previously seen on cartoons. The parents said:

“ My son got injured when he was trying to copy Superman, as he was thinking that he can fly like Superman, as a result his leg was broken when he copied Superman style flying on the stairs” (P8)

“My son favorite cartoon is Ben 10. Whenever he watches Ben 10 he likes to copy the action of the character of Ben 10, which is sometimes very annoying for me. My daughter sometimes tries to copy the language of the cartoon characters and he tries to give poses or makes face expressions like the one he watches in the cartoons” (P7)

“My daughter sometimes tries to copy her favorite cartoon character in her daily life and behaves like the character she watches in cartoons” (P6)

Majority parents had shown serious concerns regarding health problems among children. Parents mentioned that the usage of TV, computer, iPad, Internet and videogames on daily basis have created many health problems among children such as vision impairment, mental stress, headache, and sleep disorder. During weekends or long vacations, children mostly spend time especially on watching TV, cartoons, movies and playing games late at night which results in sleep disorder among them. Moreover, the children become lazy and lethargic. The extreme amount of device consumption by children results in declining of physical plays among children. Parents

revealed that the outdoor activities of the children are greatly replaced by these electronic devices. Children have been addicted to these media devices and spend majority time playing video games on computer, or other game machines and frequently engage in discussions regarding TV programs, iPad, tablet and mobile phone with their friends or cousins. As a result children are not likely to engage in healthy physical activities such as playing sports or games (football, cricket or badminton) with their friends or siblings. Parents said:

“My son’s school teacher had once complained me that my son did not watch the white board clearly and due to this he did so many mistakes while writing in notebook. When I consulted the doctor I found his eyesight became weak because of watching TV for many hours. Because of the constant exposure of TV his eye sight is affected and he wears glasses” (P12)

“When my son watches TV for long hours I observed that he becomes lazy and does not want to play any physical games or sports. My son usually makes complaint of headache to me after watching TV for more than one hour. The rays of screen cause mental stress to my child” (P3)

The exposure of children towards advertisement greatly concerns majority parents. The parents mentioned that some advertisements are especially not meant for the child audience. The parents feel uncomfortable when their children watch such inappropriate advertisements on TV. Moreover, parents revealed that children take more interest in watching advertisements regarding snacks, junk food items or fast food on television that greatly influence their dietary behavior. These advertisements are so impressive and persuasive that children start demanding parents to buy them those food items. In fact, due to lack of awareness regarding advertising techniques and tactics, children are more attracted towards flashy advertisements that made individuals feel less adequate without certain products like junk food and dining out in fast food restaurants. The parents said:

“I get worried when unsuitable ads appear while watching drama on TV and my daughter is also exposed to that. I really do not like that. Once my child watches the commercials on fast food, he can’t stop himself to dine out. So I fulfill his wish” (P12)

“My daughter watches advertisements on junk food. She also likes to eat these food items and whenever I go out with her, she grabs these things” (P5)

Some parents are seriously concerned regarding the private access of media devices by their children. Parents revealed that children use devices privately without the presence of anyone that is not good for them. With this private access parents do not know what programs their children are watching on TV and which activities are their children engaged on Internet. The parents said:

“Sometimes my son uses laptop in the room where there is no one. It really makes me worried because I am engaging in my domestic work and does not monitor properly

what he is exposing on laptop which programs and activities he is engage in” (P10)
“My son used to play iPad in the room then I do not allow him to use any small gadgets in the private room where no one can keep an eye on him” (P9)

The extreme usage of computer, video games and TV watching badly affect the education of children. Parents responded that with the easy access of information available on Internet are not likely to use their own creative minds and therefore, pay more attention on easily available readymade information on the Internet. Their constant playing of video games on computer, Internet or other game machines has made them more dull minded and lazy. The parents said:

“The more time children spend with such devices the more they will not take part in their studies. I am concerned with the device usage among children because after playing games on iPad they are no more active and energetic to study” (P2)

“This is the huge problem at my home. My son watches cartoons for many hours but when it comes to study he shows little interest and this is the really worrisome situation for me” (P1)

Some parents revealed that children are considered as vulnerable and do not understand the mediated content properly. At this young age children are not mature enough to clearly understand the content of various programs. Some parents said that children have developed complete trust on media and they think that whatever shown on media is right and based on reality. Children start to believe whatever they get from TV, Internet without knowing the authenticity of the information. Parents feel anxious that a child’s brain is not developed enough to understand whatever shown on media is often not as accurate depiction of reality.

The parents said:

“My child is immature at this age level and is not able to understand the real intention and purpose of creating such contents. Therefore, he reacts strangely and sometimes becomes nervous” (P10)

“My child believes on whatever shown on the media. He thinks everything shown on media is based on reality. Therefore, he easily develops trust on the program and content on TV and Internet” (P12)

Besides advantages of media, several risks also involved, but it all depends how their parents monitors their kids media activities. Because children mostly use media at home, so the role of parents are important to guide their children about media usage and understanding regarding media contents. Parents are also concerned regarding their children media habits, but they can only monitor their children when they are at home. In case they are not home, then child is under no parental supervision, it makes them worried as they don’t know which type of content their kid is consuming in their absence. Every parents are always conscious about the future of their children, so they

are willing to guide their children so that harmful effects of media can be minimize. In recent years technology has advanced and brought some technical tools through which parents can control media usage of their children. According to the interviews, parents revealed that they used certain mediated strategies at home regarding their children media usage activities.

A major opinion was that parents have both positive and negative experiences in handling technology for their children. Parents responded that besides negative experiences, they also feel positive experiences regarding Internet with reference to their children. Mostly parents responded that they normally encourage their children to use Internet, as it is necessary tool in the present time. Mostly parents indicated that Internet is good for academic benefits for their children. They believe that their children can do homework, research and other school assignments by using Internet. Many mentioned that they also use Internet to get information for the schoolwork of their children. Mostly parents do not hesitate to allow their children to use media devices, although consistent use of such devices for long time affects children. Children of today world have been constantly surrounded by media technology so that it becomes difficult to control their activities rather than they should be encouraged to use these devices for their better understanding and knowledge. These media devices including television, computer and Internet are the source of knowledge for the children. Parents further revealed that with the continuous advancements in technology children also need to enhance their knowledge in order to keep abreast with the technology. Upcoming generation in the future would be surrounded by such technology. There is need to give them opportunities so that they would be better tackle the problems effectively. Moreover, parents mentioned that in this media-saturated environment, children would not be stopped from using media devices otherwise children would lack confidence and they would stay behind with other children who use these devices more often. The parents said:

“Watching television enhances my child understanding of the world. He knows what’s going on in the surroundings and keeps up to date” (P7)

“I do not want my child to be dumb and silent when technology is concerned. I encourage my child to use television or Internet in order to gain full knowledge and awareness of the world” (P9)

According to the responses of the parents, almost all the parents are unaware of the concept of media literacy. When parents were asked about media literacy, some of them have misunderstood the term with the media usage. Majority parents revealed that media literacy is the usage of media technology such as television, computer, Internet, and multimedia in the classroom. Overall, the interview responses revealed the lack of awareness regarding media literacy among parents. Most of the parents’ responses pointed out that they have heard about media literacy for the first time. The

parents said:

“I believe media literacy is the presence of media technologies such as television, computer or Internet at school” (P2)

“I have no idea about media literacy as I am hearing the term first time, but I must sure it must be something related to media” (P8)

“Actually I do not understand what media literacy is. I am hearing it for the first time. I have heard about media usage which children and individuals are using in their lives such as smart phone, TV, computer and laptop” (P3)

“The term media literacy is quite new for me. Before this I have not heard about it. The name itself is quite interesting for me to know more about it” (P10)

When the researcher explained parents about the concept of media literacy then all parents showed positive attitude towards media literacy. Almost all the parents stated that media literacy is considered very important, as it's the unique field of study for the children. Parents revealed that children engage with different forms of media devices on daily basis. Controlling children media related-activities has become rather difficult, therefore, in this regard media literacy is the best concept for their better understanding of media and its content and consequently children may not be exploited by the harmful content any more. According to them, with media literacy education children would be better able to use media wisely and appropriately. Children would become sensible in understanding different techniques used in mediated programs or contents. Majority of the parents further mentioned that media literacy would be beneficial in promoting critical thinking skills among children. Children would be encouraged to critically view and analyze while using media content. Parents stated that children media literacy is the need of the day. Media literacy would be considered very important and effective, as it would discourage rote learning. The traditional teaching system has become outdated and children are no more interested in such type of methodology used in the classroom. Teaching about media technology would increase the children's interest level and motivate them towards learning. Moreover, some parents mentioned that with media literacy skill children's cognitive and intellectual development would be increased and they would not be distracted by the mediated content any more. Furthermore, parents stated that media literacy would be effective in creating active learning process among children. Today everyone get access to technology with ease so media literacy would further enhance his or her learning activities and triggered active learning process. Children would become active users of media and would not be distracted anymore. The parents said:

“I believe Media literacy as I come to know is very effective for children. Yes, I believe it is very right for today children who are more engaged with media devices that media literacy is the need of the day because children are more engaged with devices” (P9)

“I am glad to know about this term. We as parents basically need something which is

very helpful for our children to learn about media devices as they are constantly surrounded by these devices at home and outside” (P1)

“Due to the excessive amount of time children spend with the devices, it is better to teach them about the media and this concept of media literacy is very helpful for them in providing assistance and guidance to use media devices properly” (P7)

“It is the TV that inculcates into the minds of the children on what to seek. As my children watch TV on a regular basis, the incoming advertisements are mostly focused on junk foods that attract their attention and their demand is always on an increase. Even though I do stop them but it’s all in vein, therefore, I think media literacy education is necessary in this context” (P6)

When asked about the implementation of media literacy at school level, almost all the parents have shown strong willingness for the introduction of media literacy in the educational setups. Parents revealed that due to constant engagement of children with various media devices on regular basis, it has become important to introduce media literacy in school. With the introduction of media literacy at school, children would be more able to use media devices properly, better able to understand the media content, the persuasive intention of advertisements and the meanings and messages of media. Some parents further mentioned that with the introduction of media literacy in the educational curriculum, the school administration and managers should play an important role. While considering this fact school principals and higher authorities would need to design some strategy for the successful integration of media literacy at school level. Schools need to conduct workshops, seminars or initiate some programs to raise the awareness of media literacy among parents. Parents being the gatekeepers of children media usage at home, their own understanding and awareness are also considered very important. Parental understanding of media literacy would produce further fruitful results among children’s better understanding of media. These workshops and training would be helpful increasing parents’ level of awareness regarding media literacy. The parents said:

“I think it is the best way to teach our young generation with media literacy skills who are fully equipped with media technology almost everywhere. With media literacy education children will understand the media content and its messages properly” (P11)

“I am willing and more satisfied with the notion of “Media literacy”. It should be introduced in the educational curriculum in school as children are mostly immersing with various devices anywhere with no difficulty. Media literacy is important for them” (P12)

“I suggest schools should organize media literacy events and invite more and more parents and children and teachers because all are considered very important to have better understanding, knowledge and awareness of the concept of media literacy” (P2)

“As children more engage with media and it is found everywhere so this is better to teach them about media. They should know how messages are constructed and who

produces these messages. Their knowledge and understanding is very important and through media literacy it is possible. At least they have specific subject that is media literacy where they gain their knowledge and awareness about the media messages and the creation of its content” (P4)

According to the interviews of the parents, parents suggested that children should be encouraged to use devices for the positive purpose. Today it has increasingly difficult to control children from using such devices so it would be better to encourage the positive usage among them. Children should be motivated to use Internet to seek valuable information and to search for useful information. Moreover, parents revealed that children should be allowed to use devices under the supervision of parents. Parents’ supervision and monitoring would be effective for the children so that they can make healthy and accurate decisions for their children. Without supervision, children would be distracted and might come across some problems while consuming media. All the participants indicated that they discuss with their children regarding suitable uses of technology, so that they know what is not considered acceptable. Despite this, even in cases where devices are allowed in private places, parents still conduct checks and balance on the content being accessed. Furthermore, some parents suggested that adopting the strategy of co-viewing and active mediation with children is considered the suitable strategy. With this strategy parents would be able to make sure that their children expose to the right content and would discuss and share thoughts with each other. One of the parents commented that there is need to teach children not to believe everything they watch on TV, as it does not portray the reality all the time. In fact, parents should be knowledgeable not really educated so that they can make smart and accurate decisions for their children. The parents said:

“I believe that moderation is very necessary. Just because I let my children use tablets, it does not necessarily mean that I am not giving proper time to my children and I’m not a responsible parent. This is my choice and as long as I see that my children are satisfactory and doing well at school, the use of mobile devices is all good and okay for us” (P1)

“I usually allow my son to learn English vocabulary from YouTube and Apps. He also plays matching and math games. They have instructions in English so that’s good. He gets to listen from native speaker” (P6)

“Children today are so much exposed to television, that I believe that parents need to be very watchful with how much exposure kids have. I always try to guide my child and tell him the effect of eating too much sweet and candies are bad for his health, but yet, he gets attracted to this stuff whenever he watches their advertisements on TV and peruses me to buy these when we go for grocery shopping. He really puts me in the difficult situation by insisting” (P3)

“It is important to monitor children usage of smartphone/tablet as the new era of technology is very advanced now and I do not wish for them to misuse the opportunity

given. Even so, it is one way for them to be exposed to new rapid technology” (P2)

CONCLUSION

Parents have been concerned regarding media messages that children encounter on daily basis. They are concerned about the frequent and unsupervised usage of video games of their children. They believe that mostly games show violence contents that are not appropriate for children health. Besides games, children are innocent to understand the advertising contents, but they only focus colors, graphics, actors, language, music and products. Majority children are unaware of the hidden purpose of advertising. Media companies are there to attract children by using various persuasion techniques, hence, leaving the children at the mercy of media to control their wishes. The lack of awareness regarding advertising techniques, children were more attracted towards striking images found in advertisements. Children need to be aware of the advertising tactics and the persuasive intention of the advertisements. Therefore, under this consumer-driven time, it becomes vital to critically interpret and examine advertisements so that children are not easily tempted through advertisement messages. Thus, the findings of the research indicates that advocating for initiation and implementation of media literacy education will be beneficial and enhance critical thinking skills among children to understand and evaluate media content and messages. Parents in qualitative data supported this argument. Empowering children through media literacy education can address the major serious concerns of parents because restriction or limitation of children media usage is no longer effective. The study does not support the idea of total ban on media devices or media usage, as children being curious by nature would try to find alternative ways to find media devices. Thus, educators should work in collaboration with teachers and parents for mitigating the effects of media on children by preparing them to use media properly and wisely. Policy makers including teachers and parents find the solution to prepare children for media usage instead of only focus to control the potential risks of media. Therefore, children need to be taught media literacy to be more informed and skilled consumer. Besides the key concerns of parents regarding excessive media usage among children, parents still believe media such as television and Internet, as a source of information and knowledge for their children. Therefore, it is proposed that kids have easy access to media to explore and learn through media and to keep up with the technology under the supervision of parents.

The study also revealed that controlling children’s media practices get harder with various devices for parents. Children use media devices more proficiently, but being children they are not much critically strong to use media wisely. Parents should understand that although children are technically sound in using media but they are unable to understand media and mediated messages. Therefore, parents should guide them to enhance their thought process and media understanding skills. Parents can

shape their perception regarding media world. As parents are the gatekeepers of technology from permit to purchase therefore, children mostly consult parents for media devices usage at home, and parents have opportunity to observe children at home. This study emphasizes parents to mediate their children by adopting co-viewing or active mediation strategies in order to control and monitor their mediated activities. Thus, media literacy for parents is also important so that they better able to prepare their children in their daily media practices. This study urges parents to adopt parental mediation styles at home. Parents should spend more time with their children media related activities. Parents on their part should monitor children's consumption of media, observe what they do with the various media they are exposed to, instruct them where necessary rather than keep silent or restrict them unnecessarily.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study makes a valuable contribution to the field of media literacy education. The key aspect of this research is to empower children in their daily media practices by introducing media literacy at primary school. The major finding of this study reveals that although parents have no awareness of media literacy but still they expressed positive attitude towards the significance of media literacy in terms of their children's empowerment. Therefore, media literacy in schools needs to be initiated and more consistently addressed as agreed by parents. Furthermore, parents agreed to the fact that media literacy is significant for children who live in media saturated environment and constantly expose to various media forms. With media literacy education, children would be able to discriminate between reality and fantasy world created by media. Parents have key role for cultivating children about how they can interpret, evaluate and access media devices and reliance the information discovered on the Internet.

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