

PREVENTIVE EFFORTS AGAINST GADGET DEPENDENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD THROUGH PLAY ACTIVITIES IN THE BOOK " WHAT'S MORE EXCITING" BY FAJRIATUN NURHIDAYATI AND RENI ARMANITA

Nurjannah
{jannahpiaud09@gmail.com}

UIN Prof. K.H. Saifuddin Zuhri, Purwokerto

Abstract. The development of digital technology has had a significant impact on the behavior of early childhood. One of the most prominent impacts is the increasing dependence of children on gadgets as a source of entertainment. This study aims to analyze preventive efforts toward gadget dependence in early childhood through play activities depicted in the children's storybook " what's more exciting " written by Fajriatun Nurhidayati and Reni Armanita. This research employs a qualitative descriptive method using content analysis to examine the text and illustrations in the book. The findings show that the book contains character education values that function as preventive strategies against gadget dependence, such as time regulation and parental supervision of gadget use, creative play activities as an alternative to gadgets, and the strengthening of socio-emotional values through collaborative play. Through the main character Tiwi, the authors convey a moral message that playing outdoors with friends is more beneficial and enjoyable than playing gadgets alone. The play activities in this book serve as educational tools to develop children's socio-emotional, artistic-creativity, and motor skills, as well as a reflection for teachers and parents in guiding the wise use of gadgets.

Keywords: gadget dependence, early childhood, play activities.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is a period of rapid growth and development. The age of 0-6 is the most crucial period for a child (the golden age). Children in this early age possess diverse abilities. These abilities are stimulated and enhanced to enable the child to grow to their full potential. If the development of these abilities is halted or hindered, various problems will arise. Therefore, the early years are an excellent time for character building, as during this period, child's growth and development occur rapidly. (Megiati et al., 2025)

Various developmental theories provide the conceptual foundation for this technology integration effort. Piaget emphasized the importance of real-life experiences in early childhood learning, while Vygotsky, through his sociocultural theory, emphasized the importance of social interaction for cognitive and social-emotional development (Yusuf & Darmasnyah, 2025). Gadget addiction among children is defined as a situation where a child spends more than two hours a day using a gadget non-stop. They will complain even if they are not allowed to use their devices, and children find it difficult to go a day without them. To prevent early childhood dependence on devices, parents need to understand this situation and take appropriate preventive measures. This way, parents can help their children reduce excessive screen time to the point of becoming dependent on them.

The potential risks of this gadget dependence can lead to a lack of physical activity, poor psychosocial skills (e.g., interaction with friends, the ability to play actively), and even problems with concentration and attention (Arif Unggul & Labib Sajawandi, n.d.). Therefore, children who grow up and are influenced by these technological advances are often referred to as the digital generation or digital natives (Baharun and Finori, 2019). With the rapid development of technology, it seems crucial to supervise children, given the numerous negative impacts that can impact early childhood development. Therefore, parents' role in helping children navigate the digital era is crucial. (Astuti, 2023)

The use of gadgets has negative impacts on early childhood, including inappropriate content, physical health issues (vision problems, stiffness, spinal injuries due to sitting posture), dependence, and even stunting social development. Pebriana (2017) stated that gadgets negatively impact children's social interactions. The negative impacts experienced by children include impacting their social interactions with their surroundings. Furthermore, children's mental development can become more aggressive, and their communication with parents and others can decline. According to Park (2014), children who are highly dependent on gadgets have fewer opportunities to interact with others. (Miranti & Putri, 2021) Therefore, preventive measures are crucial to prevent early gadget use from developing into dependency. One effective preventive measure to reduce children's dependence on gadgets is replacing screen time with play. Play is not only fun for children, but also a natural way for them to learn and develop. Directed play activities can stimulate creativity, problem-solving skills, social skills, and motor and language development. Play, as an educational and interactive alternative, is a natural and enjoyable activity for young children.

In this context, the children's storybook "What's More Exciting?" by Fajriatun Nurhidayati and Reni Armanita provides a relevant and inspiring educational medium. This book not only presents a captivating story but also encourages children and parents to reiterate the importance of active play compared to spending time in front of a screen. The story provides a concrete illustration of how play can be more enjoyable and beneficial than playing with devices. Therefore, preventative measures against device dependence need to be implemented from an early age, perhaps through a fun approach and by getting children accustomed to more meaningful play activities. The involvement of parents and the surrounding community is also key to successfully creating positive habits, through approaches such as those offered in the book "What's More Exciting?", children can be directed to choose more concrete play activities that can support their holistic development

RESEARCH METHOD

His study used a descriptive qualitative approach, focusing on content analysis of the storybook "Apa Yang Lebih Serang" by Fajriatun Nurhidayati and Reni Armanita. This approach was chosen because it aligned with the research objectives: to understand how to prevent early childhood device addiction through play activities presented in the book's text and illustrations, and how these representations relate to the concept of Preventive Education or Learning Through Play for children. The qualitative approach allows researchers to read the text meaningfully, delving into the emotional relationships, symbols, and values implied within the story.

The primary data in this study are the narrative text and illustrations in the book "Apa Yang Lebih Serang." These two elements are read as a mutually reinforcing unit, as in children's books, meaning is constructed by words and visuals that support the narrative. Researchers explore how the character Tiwi is presented, how she interacts with her mother, older sibling, and friends, and how the emotional atmosphere created reflects how children manage their emotions and use play activities to prevent device addiction. Every element of the story, from dialogue and character actions to color and visual expression, is interpreted as part of a meaningful construction of a girl named Tiwi with a physical disability.

The analysis was conducted in three stages. The first stage was a close reading of the text and illustrations to identify narrative patterns and emotional nuances emerging in the relationships between mother, older sibling, and child. The second stage was thematic coding, identifying key themes related to efforts to prevent device addiction through early childhood play activities, such as: time management and parental supervision of device use, alternative creative play activities as substitutes for devices, and strengthening social and emotional values through collaborative play. The final stage was interpretation of meaning, in which thematic findings were connected to theories and previous research on efforts to prevent device addiction through play activities in early childhood development, specifically Play Theory (Mildred Parten & Erik Erikson) and Behaviorism (B.F. Skinner) - Positive Reinforcement.

During the analysis process, the researcher also considered the socio-cultural context surrounding the work. Children's books reflect society's values and perspectives on children's gadget addiction.

Therefore, the representation of gadgets in the book "What's More Exciting" is not only read as a personal story, but also as a social discourse about how society views preventive efforts against gadget addiction in young children in modern Indonesian families. The results of the analysis are interpreted descriptively to understand the depth of meaning and contribution of the representation of gadget addiction to our understanding of preventive efforts or appropriate steps in preventing gadget addiction. Thus, this method focuses on how the meanings contained in the book shape the overall narrative about preventive efforts against gadget addiction in early childhood through play activities in the book "What's More Exciting" by Fajriatun Nurhidayati and Reni Armanita.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

The results and discussion section of this study presents the main findings from the review and analysis of the children's storybook "What's More Exciting" by Fajriatun Nurhidayati and Reni Armanita. The book was reviewed to identify moral messages, educational values, and their relevance to the development of early childhood behavior, particularly in the context of efforts to prevent gadget dependence through play activities. The results of this reading provide an understanding of how the story, characters, plot, and illustrations in the book convey ideas about the importance of active play, social interaction, and creativity as enjoyable learning experiences for early childhood. Among these are several preventive efforts for early childhood gadget dependence in the book "What's More Exciting" Send feedback.

1. Time Regulation and Parental Supervision of Gadget Use

The book what's more exciting opens with a rainy morning scene in which a young girl with physical disabilities wants to play outside but cannot because the rain has not stopped. The girl is shown to have a hobby of playing the game Panen Raya on a gadget. From a pedagogical perspective in early childhood, regulating time and providing parental supervision over gadget use are essential components of character education and the development of positive behavior. Parents serve as the first and primary educators who structure a balanced routine for children between play, learning, and social interaction.



Figure 1. Against Gadget Dependence

One way parents help children become competent gadget users while preventing them from becoming individuals controlled or dominated by gadget use is through parental guidance (Sukiman, 2016; Tosun, 2020). Such guidance is crucial in helping children understand and use devices appropriately. Guidance does not only mean watching over a child's gadget use, but also managing and organizing their experiences when interacting with gadgets (Clark, 2011). When parents fail to provide supervision and limitations, children may lack the necessary skills and competencies to operate gadgets properly (Livingstone et al., 2015). This situation may also lead to health concerns (such as physical inactivity, addiction, and eye strain) and exposure to inappropriate content (Hidayati et al., 2023).

In the early scenes, the illustrations show the home environment and outdoor play areas such as a yard and garden depicted with harmonious visual composition and calming natural elements like trees, blue skies, and flowers. Meanwhile, scenes showing children using gadgets display dull background colors and neutral facial expressions, symbolizing passive and less interactive states.

Subsequent illustrations depict Tiwi, the young girl with physical disabilities, showing impatience, frustration, and emotional tension when she fails to borrow her mother's phone to continue her game. From a psychological perspective, a frown is a form of nonverbal communication that reflects a child's difficulty in expressing negative emotions verbally. In early childhood psychology, parents must understand and apply the following: first, parents act as partners for their children because children need someone who can listen and provide emotional support during their experiences. Parents, as the closest figures, should function as emotional anchors for their children (Nurliana & Ulya, 2021).

When Tiwi cannot play outside due to the rain, she sees her mother's phone on the table and wants to use it, but her mother refuses. From both pedagogical and psychological perspectives, parents play a crucial role in shaping safe and healthy gadget use. By limiting gadget access, parents help children develop self-regulation and emotional control (Hidayati et al., 2023).

2. Creative Play Activities as Alternatives to Gadget Use

Play activities serve as an alternative to gadget use. When Tiwi was unable to play outside due to the rainy weather and a power outage at home, she eventually decided to engage in indoor play activities. One of the activities she chose was block play.

Creativity is one of the potentials that children possess and must be developed from an early age. Every child has their own creative talents. Play is a fundamental need that must be fulfilled, as it provides numerous positive benefits for children's development. According to Hurlock (2010), play activities are carried out solely for the pleasure they offer, without concern for the final outcome. These activities are performed voluntarily, without coercion or pressure from others. Hurlock (2010) also states that play is an activity chosen by children because it brings them joy, not because it offers rewards or recognition.



Figure 2. tiwi's play activities

Through play, all aspects of children's development can be enhanced; they can explore to strengthen the knowledge they already possess and discover new things. Through play, children are able to optimize their potential. Therefore, play is essential for the development of all aspects of a child's growth. One enjoyable activity children can engage in is block play, which can serve as a meaningful option to support their creativity.

(Suryana & Desmila, 2022). The illustrations support this idea using bright and dynamic colors when children engage in play activities, emphasizing that real-world play is more meaningful and enjoyable than gadget use.

After becoming disappointed because her mother's phone battery runs out and she can no longer borrow it, Tiwi chooses to continue her playtime with physical activities. These include block play, where she constructs buildings, explores geometric shapes, and learns about size and form (Suryana & Desmila, 2022). Tiwi also engages in creative activities such as making a mini garden using paper craft drawing, coloring, and cutting trees, making small harvest boxes, and crafting animals like chickens and goats. She realizes that the miniature garden she created resembles the Panen Raya game. Even when the rain stops, Tiwi continues playing with her mini garden enthusiastically.

From an early childhood pedagogical perspective, such play becomes an effective strategy to direct children toward real, creative activities.

3. Strengthening Social-Emotional Values Through Collaborative Play

The arrival of Tiwi's friends a boy and a girl who had been playing games on their phones marks the beginning of collaborative play. They become more interested in Tiwi's handmade toys than in their gadgets. They put their phones aside and decide to play together with Tiwi. In the final scene, Tiwi and her friends are shown happily creating their own garden with drawings of trees, farmers, chickens, and goats. Tiwi's friends exclaim, "Wow, this is more fun!"



Figure 3. tiwi's play with friend

The illustrations in this section depict children laughing together under a bright sky, symbolizing joy and togetherness. Overall, the book emphasizes that real-world play is more enjoyable, healthier, and fosters stronger social bonds among children.

Social-emotional development must be nurtured from an early age because it influences children's behavior and personality as they grow. Young children need opportunities to socialize actively with peers, tell stories, collaborate in groups, and help one another. Collaborative learning methods support and enhance children's social abilities, making them particularly beneficial in early childhood learning (Amini et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that the storybook what's more exciting by Fajriatun Nurhidayati and Reni Arminta effectively illustrates preventive efforts against gadget dependency in early childhood through an educational and enjoyable play-based approach. Through content analysis of both text and illustrations, it was found that this work not only conveys moral messages about the importance of real-life play activities but also incorporates character education values that support the holistic development of children.

First, time management and parental supervision serve as fundamental steps in preventing gadget dependency. The role of parents as the child's first educators is reflected in cultivating children's habits to balance their time between playing, learning, and using technology. Parental guidance fosters the development of self-regulation skills and emotional control, which are essential for building independent and responsible character.

Second, alternative creative play activities function as substitutes for excessive gadget use. Activities such as building with blocks and creating a mini garden demonstrate how children's creativity can grow through concrete experiences. These activities not only stimulate imagination and motor skills but also strengthen critical thinking abilities and exploratory skills that support meaningful learning. In a pedagogical context, play serves as a natural learning strategy ("learning through play") that cultivates children's curiosity, independence, and self-confidence.

Third, the strengthening of social and emotional values through collaborative play is reflected in the interactions between the character Tiwi and her friends. Through shared play activities, children learn to cooperate, empathize, and share, thereby enhancing their social and emotional intelligence. The illustrations depicting children's happy expressions and their togetherness emphasize the message that real-life play activities are not only more enjoyable but also more meaningful for the development of early childhood social relationships.

Conceptually, the findings of this study support developmental theories such as Play Theory (Parten & Erikson) and Behaviorism (Skinner), which emphasize that concrete experiences and positive reinforcement play a significant role in shaping adaptive child behavior. Thus, the play activities portrayed in this book function as an effective preventive strategy to reduce children's reliance on gadgets while simultaneously fostering cognitive, socio-emotional, and creative development.

Practically, this study provides implications for parents, teachers, and early childhood educators to be more proactive in guiding the wise use of gadgets by enriching children's play experiences in real, interactive, and meaningful contexts. The book what's more exciting can serve as an educational literacy medium that instills critical awareness of the impact of technology and promotes a culture of healthy play within families and early childhood education institutions.

References

- Amini, S., Hasibuan, R., & Bachri, B. S. (2024). Collaborative Learning through Jump Rope Game on Children's Social-Emotional Motor Skills. *Aulad: Journal on Early Childhood*, 7(2), 488–495. <https://doi.org/10.31004/aulad.v7i2.722>
- Arif Unggul & Labib Sajawandi. (n.d.). Analysis of Behavioral Changes in Early Childhood Children Addicted to Gadgets. *Journal of Early Childhood Education (JCPAUD)*.
- Astuti, R. (2023). Gadget Use in Early Childhood Care in the Industrial Revolution 4.0 Era. *Islamic EduKids*, 5(1), 39–52. <https://doi.org/10.20414/iek.v5i1.7172>
- Hidayati, N., Djoehaeni, H., & Zaman, B. (2023). Parental Guidance in Limiting Gadget Use in Early Childhood. *Jurnal Obsesi: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 7(1), 915–926. <https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v7i1.3004>
- Megiati, Y. E., Pratiwi, N. K., Basir, R. R., & Mariyanih, D. (2025). Gadget Use in Early Childhood. *Kapas: Kumpulan Artikel Pengabdian Komunitas*, 3(3). <https://doi.org/10.30998/ks.v3i3.3874>
- Miranti, P., & Putri, L. D. (2021). Beware of the Impact of Gadget Use on the Social Development of Early Childhood. *Jendela PLS*, 6(1), 58–66. <https://doi.org/10.37058/jpls.v6i1.3205>
- Nurliana, N., & Ulya, M. (2021). Childhood Education: A Psychological Perspective. *Al-Liqo: Journal of Islamic Education*, 6(1), 56–67. <https://doi.org/10.46963/alliqo.v6i1.313>
- Suryana, D. & Desmila. (2022). Developing Children's Creativity through Block Play Activities. *PAUD Lectura: Journal of Early Childhood Education*, 5(02), 143–153. <https://doi.org/10.31849/paud-lectura.v5i02.8632>
- Yusuf, S., & Darmasnyah, D. (2025). Technology Integration in Early Childhood Learning. *Aulad: Journal on Early Childhood*, 8(2), 1034–1040. <https://doi.org/10.31004/aulad.v8i2.1055>