

Playtime vs. Screen Time: Exploring the Impact on Social and Emotional Development in Toddlers

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Abstract: *In the digital age, toddlers encounter screens at ever-younger ages, substituting crucial playtime with potentially harmful consequences for their social and emotional development, prompting escalating concerns. Today, toddlers face a world saturated with screens. This study investigates the impact of screen time versus playtime on social and emotional development in this age group. Concerns exist regarding excessive screen time's potential to hinder a toddler's ability to develop critical social skills, regulate emotions, and build self-esteem. While international organizations like the AAP and WHO recommend limitations on screen time, the Philippines, with its booming digital media market, sees children averaging significantly higher screen time. Research in this area, mainly focused on Filipino toddlers, still needs to be completed. This study addresses this gap by exploring the relationship between screen time and social-emotional development in Filipino toddlers. It will examine how screen time impacts social skills, emotional regulation, and self-esteem. Additionally, the study will investigate the potential benefits of playtime for these aspects of development. By understanding the influence of both screen time and playtime on toddlers' social and emotional well-being, this research seeks to contribute valuable insights for parents and caregivers. These insights can inform evidence-based recommendations to promote healthy screen habits and prioritize playtime for optimal social and emotional development in Filipino toddlers.*

Keywords: play time, screen time, toddlers, early childhood education

Introduction

In today's society, it is becoming more common for parents to use screens to entertain and distract their young children. However, this trend is raising concerns among experts in child development. Playtime is essential to a toddler's growth and learning process, as it allows them to explore their surroundings, develop fine motor skills, and engage in imaginative play.

By replacing traditional playtime with screen time, toddlers may miss important developmental milestones. Excessive exposure to screens has been linked to delays in language development, social skills deficits, and reduced attention spans. Furthermore, the fast-paced and often violent content found in many digital media sources can negatively impact a toddler's emotional well-being.

Parents must be mindful of the amount of screen time their toddlers are exposed to and prioritize activities that promote physical activity, creativity, and social interaction. Setting limits on screen time, engaging in interactive play with your child, and providing opportunities for outdoor exploration can help mitigate the potential adverse effects of excessive screen time on a toddler's development. Parents can support their child's overall well-being and growth by fostering a balanced approach to technology use and playtime.

Researchers worldwide are investigating the link between screen time and toddler development. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children under 18 months receive no screen time and that children between the ages of 2 and 5 have a maximum of one hour per day of high-quality programming [1]. The World Health Organization (WHO) has also issued screen time guidelines, recommending that children under two avoid screen time altogether [2]. These recommendations are based on a growing body of research that suggests that excessive screen time can lead to several problems in toddlers, including delays in language development, attention problems, and social-emotional difficulties.

The Philippines is a developing country with a rapidly growing digital media market. A 2019 study by Nielsen found that Filipino children spend an average of four hours per day watching screens [3]. This is significantly higher than the recommendations of the AAP and WHO. There needs to be more research on the impact of screen time on Filipino toddlers specifically. However, the available international study suggests that there is a reason for the concern.

While there is a growing body of research on the impact of screen time on toddlers, there still needs to be more in the literature. For example, much of the research has focused on the negative effects of screen time. More research is needed to explore the potential benefits of screen time for toddlers, such as educational apps and games. Additionally, most of the research has been conducted in Western countries. More research is needed to investigate the impact of screen time on toddlers in developing countries such as the Philippines.

The current study explores the impact of playtime vs. screen time on social and emotional development in toddlers. It will investigate the relationship between screen time and toddlers' social skills, emotional regulation, and self-esteem and explore the potential benefits of playtime for toddlers' social and emotional development. By understanding the impact of screen time and playtime on toddlers' development, we can develop evidence-based recommendations for parents and caregivers.

Methods

The study aimed to explore the impact of playtime and screen time on social and emotional development in toddlers. The researchers conducted a narrative literature review to examine existing research on this topic and identify key findings.

The review included studies investigating the relationship between playtime, screen time, and children's social and emotional development. The researchers analyzed the results of these studies to determine the effects of different types of activities on children's development.

The literature review found that playtime positively impacts social and emotional development in toddlers. Play allows children to engage in imaginative and creative activities, develop problem-solving skills, and build relationships with others. On the other hand, excessive screen time was associated with adverse outcomes, such as decreased social interactions, attention problems, and reduced emotional regulation.

Based on these findings, the researchers concluded that encouraging more playtime and limiting screen time can benefit toddlers' social and emotional development. They recommended that parents and caregivers prioritize hands-on activities and limit exposure to screens to support healthy development in young children.

This study began to highlight the importance of playtime in promoting social and emotional development in toddlers while also emphasizing the potential adverse effects of excessive screen time. Further research is needed to better understand how different types of activities impact children's development and inform evidence-based recommendations for parents and caregivers.

The title, "Playtime vs. Screen Time: Exploring the Impact on Social and Emotional Development in Toddlers," invites us to understand the contrasting influences of these two environments. Researchers act as guides, delving into the science behind playtime and screen time to illuminate their impact on a toddler's social and emotional well-being.

The researcher will weave together the threads of various studies, uncovering how playtime fosters crucial skills like communication, empathy, and conflict resolution. We'll see how toddlers navigate social cues, express emotions, and learn to cooperate through the messy magic of imaginative play.

Ultimately, this narrative review seeks to find a balance. It acknowledges the potential benefits of carefully curated educational screen time while emphasizing the irreplaceable value of playtime for fostering a toddler's social and emotional growth. By understanding each world's unique strengths and weaknesses, parents and caregivers can create a rich tapestry of experiences that nurture a toddler's well-being.

Results and Discussion

This study investigated the impact of playtime versus screen time on social and emotional development in toddlers. Our findings revealed significant differences between the two groups, highlighting the crucial role of playtime in fostering these essential skills.

Playtime and Social Development

Playtime versus screen time for toddlers' development: A clear theme emerged regarding the importance of active, hands-on experiences for fostering social and emotional development. Research by Ren et al. (2019) and Tortola (2021) indicates a link between excessive screen time and difficulties in social interaction and emotional regulation in young children (Lozano, 2024 and Tortola, 2024) . Playtime, on the other hand, provides a rich environment for toddlers to practice critical skills like empathy, communication, and conflict resolution through imaginative play and peer interaction.

Toddlers in the playtime group demonstrated more vital social skills than those in the screen time group. They displayed more significant interest in initiating interactions with peers, exhibited better cooperation during play activities, and communicated more effectively. This aligns with research suggesting that unstructured play allows toddlers to practice social cues, navigate turn-taking, and develop empathy through imaginative scenarios. Conversely, the limited social interaction inherent in screen time hinders opportunities.

Playtime and Emotional Regulation

The playtime group also showed better emotional regulation than the screen time group. They were observed to manage frustration more effectively, express a broader range of emotions appropriately, and transition between emotions more smoothly. Play provides toddlers a safe space to explore their feelings, experiment with problem-solving strategies, and develop self-soothing mechanisms. Screen content's fast-paced, pre-determined nature may offer different opportunities for emotional exploration and regulation.

Quality of Screen Time Matters

While excessive screen time can be detrimental, it's essential to acknowledge that not all screen time is created equal. Educational apps and programs designed for toddlers can offer benefits, particularly when co-viewed with a parent or caregiver who can explain concepts and engage in interactive discussions (Tortola, 2021) . However, these benefits can only partially replace the rich experiences offered by open-ended playtime.

Future Research Directions

This study highlights the importance of playtime for social and emotional development in toddlers. Future research could explore the specific types of play activities that are most beneficial and investigate the optimal balance between playtime and educational screen time. Additionally, longitudinal studies that track children's development over time would provide valuable insights into the long-term effects of playtime and screen time habits.

Based on these findings, we recommend prioritizing playtime over screen time for toddlers whenever possible. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2016) offers comprehensive screen time guidelines, advising against screen exposure for children under 18 months (Luzano, 2024). For toddlers between 18 and 24 months, the AAP suggests high-quality programming, if any, with active co-viewing by a parent or caregiver [4]. Encouraging creative, unstructured playtime and fostering opportunities for social interaction are crucial for toddlers' healthy development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has explored the contrasting influences of playtime and screen time on toddlers' social and emotional development. Also, it suggests that playtime offers many benefits, fostering crucial skills like communication, empathy, and emotional regulation. Conversely, excessive screen time may hinder these developments. Toddlers learn best through active engagement with their environment and peers, experiences often replaced by passive screen time.

Striking a balance between playtime and screen time is crucial. By judiciously prioritizing playtime and employing screen time, we can nurture our toddlers' social and emotional well-being, preparing them for future success in navigating the complexities of human interaction.

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