Current Debates on Social Sciences

8

Zeynel KARACAGİL



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Zeynel KARACAGİL

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The Relationship Between Children's Digital Playing Tendencies and Receptive Language Skills in The Covid-19 Pandemic

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Introduction

Language is the most basic tool that individuals use in the process of communicating, socializing, and conveying their feelings, thoughts, experiences, dreams, and wishes to other individuals. Words are the sound or sound unity that forms the building block of language and carries meaning (Bloom and Lahey: 10). Children understand their first words earlier than they speak. In the first years of life, receptive vocabulary (words the child understands) considerably exceeds spoken vocabulary (words the child uses) (Santrock, 2016: 262).

Language has two essential components; expressive and receptive. Expressive language is the child's expressing his feelings and thoughts in words or sentences. The prerequisite for expressive language is receptive language. Receptive language skill is defined as being able to distinguish the sounds that the individual hears, understand, and apply the instructions and understand the words and grammatical structure of the language (Leonard, 2009: 1; McLaughlin, 2011: 1; Smolak, 1982: 14). Children's receptive language skills are influenced by several factors such as siblings, early childhood education, mother's and father's education level, digital plays via tablet computers, and so on (Koçak, Ergin, and Yalçın, 2014: 102-104). Nowadays, children are exposed to technological devices more than previous generations. Therefore, today's children are affected by technology more than ever before. In early childhood, children use technological devices mostly for playing digital games (Hu, Johnson, Teo and Wu, 2020: 194).

Digital game is defined in many different ways by researchers today. In its most general definition, it is expressed as a concept that is realized by the integration of technology with games and the use of digital tools such as computers, tablets, smart phones, and game consoles. Digital games, which have become a popular culture, appear on screens that are almost everywhere in children's lives (Fleer, 2014: 2; Goodwin, 2018: 137).

Studies conducted in recent years show that preschool children spend a significant part of their time at home in front of screens such as tablets, smartphones, television, computers and so on. (Can-Yaşar, İnal, Uyanık and Kandır, 2012: 381; Livingstone et al., 2014: 38; Neumann and Neumann, 2014: 237; Plowman, Stevenson, Stephen and McPake, 2012: 33; Rideout, 2014: 38; Aktaş-Arnas, 2005: 65; Altun, 2019: 1169; Konca and Köksalan, 2017: 578; Tuğrul, Ertürk, Özen-Altınkaynak and Güneş, 2014: 12). According to the Digital Game Report (2019: 10), nearly 30 million people in Turkey play digital games. Kabali et al. (2015: 3) demonstrate that the families that participated in the research have televisions (97%), tablets (83%), and smartphones (77%).

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Almost all children (96.6%) in the research sample group use digital tools and most of them started to use them before the age of one. Cingel and Krcmar (2013: 387) state that many children around the age of one and younger than one have access to digital games. It is seen that parents give digital tools to children while doing housework (70%), to stay calm (65%), and before going to bed (29%). As seen in the results of the research, digital tools are highly involved in the lives of many families today, and children are introduced to these digital tools at a very early age. Şahin et al. (2015: 339), in their research examining the use of tablet computers as support materials in preschool education, revealed that half of the children have their own tablet computers. In addition, the children stated that they like tablet computer game activities in educational environments and they want to have tablet computer activities frequently. As research shows that today children are overexposed to digital devices.

Using technological devices at an early age may have both pros and cons effects on children's development. For example, communicating with distant relatives through video chat technologies and listening to digital books positively affect children's language development. A study examining the effects of digital games on the language acquisitions of children aged 3-7 showed the favourable impacts of these games on letter phonetics, rhyme, and vocabulary (Chiong and Shuler, 2010: 19). Computers, tablets, smart phones and other electronic devices if appropriately used might support children's receptive language skills (Hu et al., 2020: 199).

According to a few studies, digital games played on traditional computers might help children learn new words. Michael Cohen Group (2010), illustrates that second and third graders played a PBS game called *Mission to Planet 429* for two weeks and demonstrated advances in vocabulary words taught by the game in contrast to a control group who played science games. According to Schmitt et al. (2018), children who played PBS literacy-focused games at home for 8 weeks enhanced their vocabulary compared to children who got puzzle- and arts-themed games.

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between children's digital playing tendencies and receptive language skills in the Covid-19. According to the literature, there are many studies examining receptive language skills in early childhood. However, the number of studies examining the relationship between digital playing tendencies and children's receptive language skills is limited. Therefore, it is thought that the study will contribute to the literature. In addition, the result of the research is important in terms of revealing the relationship between the digital playing tendency and the receptive language development of children during the Covid-19. Within the scope of this study, answers to the following questions were sought:

1-Do children's receptive language skills differ significantly according to the demographic variables (children's gender, age, parent's education level etc.)?

2-Do children's digital playing tendencies differ significantly according to demographic variables (children's gender, age, parent's education level etc.)?

3-Is there a significant relationship between the children's receptive language skills and their tendency to play digital games?

Method

Study Design

This study is in the quantitative research approach and the correlational model was designed to determine the relationships between digital playing and receptive language skills. This model, to determine relationships between variables and predict possible outcomes, does not affect

or control variables. Instead, statistical data for each sample's scores comparisons are made (Tekbıyık, 2014, 101).

Sample Group

The sample group of the study was determined by convenience sampling method which is chosen due to limitations in terms of time, money and labor, and it provides an advantage to researchers in selecting participants from applicable units and in other issues (Büyüköztürk et.al. 2012). For this reason, the researchers determined two preschools at the university as the sample group using convenience sampling method, and informed consent forms were sent to the parents of 114 children in the two preschools. Thirty-seven children with normal development were included in the study according to their family and child consent. The demographic information of the children is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Variables

Variables		N	%
Age of Mother	18-35	16	43.2
	36 and above	21	56.8
	Total	37	100
Age of Father	18-35	8	21.6
	36 and above	29	78.4
	Total	37	100
Education Level of Mother	Associate degree and below	5	13.5
	Undergraduate	22	59.5
	Postgraduate	10	27
	Total	37	100
Education Level of Father	Associate degree and below	6	16.2
	Undergraduate	19	51.4
	Postgraduate	12	32.4
	Total	37	100
Socioeconomic Level	Low-Middle	3	8.1
	Middle	30	81.1
	High	4	10.8
	Total	37	100
Sex of Child	Girl	15	40.5
	Boy	22	59.5
	Total	190	100

Measures

To collect data in this study, the Information Form prepared by the researchers and the "The Peabody Picture- Vocabulary Test" adapted to Turkish by Katz, Önen, Uzlukaya, Demir, and Uludağ (1974) and Digital Play Addiction Tendency Scale developed by Budak (2020) were used.

Digital Play Addiction Tendency Scale

The Digital Play Addiction Tendency Scale was developed by Budak (2020) to evaluate the level of digital game addiction tendencies of preschool children. The scale consists of four sub-dimensions; Detachment from Life (seven items), Conflict (five items), Continuous Playing (five items), Reflecting on Life (three items). In the Digital Play Addiction Tendency Scale, the sub-dimension "Detachment from Life", the disconnection of children in their social lives during the process of playing digital games, the reactive behaviours they show when the "Conflict" sub-

dimension prevents digital play, the sub-dimension of "Continuous Playing" spending a long time with digital games in their daily lives and demanding it, and In the sub-dimension "Reflecting on Life", the effects of digital games on children's lives include possible signs of problems. The reliability coefficients (Cronbach's Alpha) of the sub-dimensions of the scale, respectively, are as follows; Detachment from life= .88, Conflict= .90, Continuous Play= .82, Reflecting on Life= .70, and the total reliability coefficient of the scale was determined as .93. The scale consists of 20 items and is a 5-point Likert (5: Always, 4: Often, 3: Sometimes, 2: Rarely, 1: Never). The lowest score that can be obtained from the scale is "20" and the highest score is "100". As the total score obtained from the scale increases, children's addiction tendencies towards digital games increase.

Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test

The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test was administered to assess receptive language skills. The Peabody picture vocabulary test has been used in many studies to determine the differences between children's vocabulary. It was developed in 1959 by special education experts Lloyd M. Dunn and Leota M. Dunn. It was adapted into Turkish by Dr. Jack Katz and colleagues in 1974, its norms were developed and applied to Turkish children aged 2-12. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test consists of 100 cards in total. Each card has 4 separate pictures, which determine vocabulary development with pictures to determine the child's receptive language skills (Öner, 1997: 109).

Data Collection and Analyses

Data collection phase was collected in two dimensions as child and parent dimension. Informed consent form was given to the parents before the study data were collected. Thirty-seven parents gave positive feedback. Afterwards, the study was explained to thirty-seven children with parental consent in a simple way and their verbal consent was obtained. All thirty-seven children participated in the study voluntarily. Before the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test was given to the children, a short 5-minute conversation was given as an ice-breaking activity. It was observed that the children were quite comfortable during the test, as they were familiar with the researchers. The test took approximately 30 minutes to complete for a child. The Digital Play Addiction Tendency scale and personal information form were given to parents to fill out. The data were entered into a suitable statistical program and descriptive and correlational analyzes were made by using Pearson Correlation Test, The Mann-Whitney U, The Kruskal-Wallis H, Independent-samples T-Tests and one-way ANOVA test.

Results

When the digital tools in the home environment are examined (Table 2), it is seen that there are smart phones in all houses and there are laptops (86.48%) and tablets (70.27%) in the majority of the houses.

Table 2. Digital Tools at Home

	N	%
Smart phone	37	100
Laptop	32	86.48
Computer	11	29.72
Tablet	26	70.27
Others	2	5.40

When the digital game tools that children can use in the home environment are examined (Table 3), it is seen that 64.9% of the children play games on smart phones. 32.4% of the children use the tablet as a game tool. Only 2.7% of children do not play digital games.

Table 3. The Most Used Digital Game Tools by Children

	N	%
Smart phone	24	64.9
Tablet	12	32.4
Digital game not playing	1	2.7

97.3% of the children in the study play digital games, and when the situation of these children spending time with these tools is examined (Table 4), 21.6% of the children play digital games for less than 30 minutes a day, while 62.2% of the children play digital games between 30-60 minutes is playing games. 16.2% of children play on digital tools for more than 61 minutes a day.

Table 4. Child's Daily Playing Time with the Digital Tool

	N	%
Less than 30 minutes	8	21.6
Between 30-60 minutes	23	62.2
More than 61 minutes	6	16.2

The chronological age of the children included in this study is between 33 and 73 months, with an average of 56.94 months. According to the Peabody test, the receptive language age of the children is between 30-119 months, with an average of 88.43. The receptive language ages of the children were greater than the chronological ages. Children's scores from the Peabody test range from 24-81, with an average score of 58.1. Children's digital game scale scores range from 24-78 points, with an average score of 42.54.

In order to investigate the relationship between children's receptive language scores and digital game scores, first of all, the normality distributions of the data were examined. The skewness value of the receptive language score was -.57 and the kurtosis value was -.64. The skewness value of the digital game score was .55 and the kurtosis value was -.69. Since the skewness and kurtosis values are between -1 and +1, it can be said that the data are normally distributed (Hair et al., 2013). Since the data are normally distributed and the units are more than 30, the relationship between receptive language and digital game has been examined with the Pearson correlation test, which is one of the parametric analysis methods. As shown in Table 5, the results indicate that there is no significant relationship. The relationship between children's daily digital game playing time and receptive language scores was also examined with the Pearson correlation test, and no significant relationship was found. In other words, there was no relationship between children's digital game playing status, daily digital game playing time and receptive language skills.

Table 5. Pearson Correlation Test Between Language Score and Digital Play Score

		Receptive Lang. Score	Digital Play Score
Receptive Lang. Score	Pearson Correlation	1	-.124
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.464
	N	37	37
Digital Play Score	Pearson Correlation	-.124	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.464	
	N	37	37

Nonparametric methods were used to evaluate the relationship between demographic variables and children's digital play situations/receptive language. The Mann-Whitney U test was used for the relationship between child gender, parental age and digital game scale scores, and no significant relationship was found between child gender and parental age. The Kruskal-Wallis H test was used for the relationship between parental education levels, family income and digital game scale scores, and no significant difference was found. Demographic variables do not affect children's digital play status and receptive language scores.

Discussion

This study examined the relationship between the children's receptive language skills and their tendency to play digital games. Our sample included 33-73 months old children who have average Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test score is 88.43, average Digital Play Addiction Tendency Scale score is 42.54. There are smart phones in all houses and there are laptops (86.48%) and tablets (70.27%) in the majority of the houses. According to findings, 64.9% of the children play games on smart phones. 32.4% of the children use the tablet as a game tool. Only 2.7% of children do not play digital games. In this study 21.6% of the children play digital games for less than 30 minutes a day, while 62.2% of the children play digital games between 30-60 minutes is playing games. In the manner of results, 16.2% of children play on digital tools for more than 61 minutes a day. Demographic variables do not affect children's receptive language skills and their tendency to play digital games.

It is a fact that technology makes life easier, technological tools save time and energy while doing daily work, and these tools have so many uncountable benefits. Studies have shown that as a result of using technology within the framework of appropriate and correct objectives, it supports the children's development. For example, technology supports children's thinking skills while providing opportunities to express their ideas, take responsibility and problem-solving skills (Clements and Sarama, 2002: 341). In addition, when digital tools are used appropriately in early childhood, they increase the children's motivation and make positive contributions to their language skills and problem-solving skills (Couse and Chen, 2010: 93). A study with kindergartner shows that children's receptive language skills were significantly and positively associated with their active screen time (Hu et al., 2020: 195). On the contrary, there are some studies determined that the spending time on computers and television does not contribute to children's receptive language skills and vocabulary development (Blankson et al., 2015: 280; Boeglin-Quintana and Donovan, 2013: 54; Kelly and Schorger, 2001: 134; McCarrick and Li, 2007: 88). According to Altun (2019: 1170), preschool children's receptive language skills did not differ significantly according to the duration of watching TV and playing digital games. Children who spend their time playing digital games have the lowest expressive language vocabulary, while children who listen to music/songs have the highest expressive language vocabulary. There are some studies examining the amount

and habits of playing digital games. In a recent study, Urfa (2020: 104-110) examined the parental opinions on children's smartphone/tablet usage habits and the influence of these habits on the development of their children. As a result, it has been revealed that children's smartphone/tablet usage habits have negative effects on several developmental areas such as language, socioemotional, gross motor and so on. In this study, no association was found between digital playing tendencies and receptive language skills. It may also be due to the limited sample size. As mentioned above, there is no consensus about whether digital playing habits have positive impacts on children's language skills or not.

Tablets, smartphones and computers that entered our lives with the development of technology have not only changed the world of adults, but also changed the way children play and their tools. Within this new "family media ecology" (Wartella, Rideout, Lauricella and Connell, 2013: 7) the interaction of young children with digital technologies has become a daily event in the home life (Flewitt, Messer and Kucirkova, 2014: 7). In this study, all of the children had access to a smart phone, 86.48% had access to a laptop and 70.27% had access to a tablet. This shows us how easy it is for children to access digital games. For these children who were born as digital natives, digital games have also become a part of their lives. Akkuş, Yılmazer, Şahinöz and Sucaklı (2015: 356) examined the time children spend on technological devices such as computers, tablets, and smartphones and it was found that 24.5% of children spend 1 hour or more. In this study, 62.2% of children spend 30-60 minutes, 16.2% of children spend more than 60 minutes playing digital games with technological devices in their daily life. When the effect of children playing games in front of the screen on their language development is examined, no significant difference was found between the playing time and receptive language skills. Linebarger and Walker (2005: 631-638) revealed that the content of the programs children watch is more important than the time they spend in front of television, and that educational programs with rich vocabulary (Dora) contribute more to children's vocabulary acquisition than programs with fewer words (Teletubbies). For this reason, it is also important to examine the content of the programs and applications that children use together with their vocabulary acquisition and the time they spend with technological devices.

Considering the effect of demographic variables on the tendency to play digital games, no significant relationship was found in this study. Similarly, in the study of Dilci, Arslan, and Ersoy (2019: 130-137) with children aged newborn to twelve, parental gender, marital status and educational status do not affect children's digital game addiction. The results of Aydoğdu's (2018: 6-15) study also show that gender, number of siblings, educational background of father and mother were not influential on digital game addiction level of children. It is stated that adults have a great role in children's tendency to play digital games (Haake, Axelsson, Clausen-Bruun and Gulz, 2015: 15). The age and education of the parents may not affect the child's play tendency, but it is stated that children are affected by the digital games played by adults (Akkoyunlu and Tuğrul, 2002: 16-20). It has been determined that the adults around children have a significant effect on children's playing digital games, and in this context, it is the finding of the research that children take the adults around them as models (Mesman, Kuo, Carroll and Ward, 2013: 455-457).

In this study, there is no significant difference found between children's age, gender and parents' education level on children's receptive language skills. According to the research conducted by Taner-Derman (2017: 375-378), the receptive language skills of 202 children were measured with the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, it was determined that the mother's education level had no effect on the receptive language skills, but the father's education level affects six-year-

old children's receptive language skills. Similarly, according to the research conducted by Erdoğan, Şimşek, and Erdoğan (2005: 236-244), it was found that the education level of the mother did not have a significant effect on the children's receptive language skills. On the other hand, Koçak et al. (2014: 102-104) found in their study that children's age, gender and parent's education level variables make a significant difference to the language development of 5-6 years old children. According to the literature, research results are inconsistent thus more research is required to explain and understand better.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this study, no significant effect of demographic variables on receptive language and digital play was found. In addition, no significant relationship was found between receptive language skills and the tendency to play digital games. For this reason, our recommendations for future work are as follows;

- Future studies should examine the association between digital playing tendencies and receptive language skills in a larger sample size.
- The content of the programs and applications that children use together with their vocabulary acquisition and the time they spend with technological devices should be examined in future studies.
- Children's digital game tendencies can be examined in terms of parenting attitudes.
- Children's digital game tendencies can be examined in terms of parents' spending time with digital tools and parents' digital game tendency.

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