



ISSN 2543-506X

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/CSNME.2018.004>

Received: May 30, 2018 / Accepted: a) June 19, 2018; b) July 20, 2018

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The Impact of Using Technology in the Behavior of Children with Special Needs

Abstract. The influence of television is powerful in creating opinions, in modeling behaviors and in character formation in children with special needs. The purpose of this study is to analyze through a qualitative analysis the impact of technological means such as television on the development and formation of positive and negative behaviors in children with special needs.

Keywords: technological tools; disability; imitation-modeling

Introduction

In our daily life technology is gaining an important place. One of the most familiar devices with man today is certainly television. Also other devices like smart phones, computers through which you can connect

to the Internet. This study focuses on the impact of technological equipment such as television on the behavior of children with special needs, specifically in school children in the city of Elbasan. Television is a device that is occupying a considerable time in the lives of children with special needs and is significantly affecting the positive and negative aspects of their behavior. In general, watching television can lead to positive and negative effects on the discourse of behavior and emotions of children with special needs.

Children with special needs note delays in their speaking skills. Studies show that the pursuit of educational programs helps children learn forms, numbers, letters, and so on, (Lemish, D. and Rice, M., 1986). Naigles and Mayeux (2001) found that under certain circumstances children learn words and meanings from educational programs that are specifically for them.

Encourage creativity in children. Through the colorful illustrated children's programs, children's creativity and imagination awaken, which are very important abilities to develop mainly in children with special needs.

In addition to positive effects, it may send out wrong and negative messages. Children with special needs find it difficult to distinguish fantasy from reality and television enables them to leave the real world. Television is often used to promote unreliable values and misconceptions that children adopt in a non-critical manner.

The "Copycat" phenomenon determines the imitation or copying of a person's behavior or behavior from a particular TV show (Sparks, 2013).

An example of this is whether a child sees on television a behavior of violence, the likelihood of imitation is high and the repetition of behavior for a long time turns violent behavior into parts of the child's personality (Cline, et al, 1973).

Long-standing TV position affects not only the content of programs, but also affects the health of special needs children; makes him more passive in physical movements, weakens interaction with the peers by being isolated in front of the screen. Fear and anxiety are taught and promoted through television (Wilson 2008).

Prior to the list of positive and negative aspects it is necessary to select the adults from the programs and the appropriate TV content for children with special needs of all ages. It is very important and indispensable to select programs that respond to the child's age. There is no doubt

that television can be a great and fun teacher. Its primary effect lies in the fact that it affects the sphere of visual auditory perception.

The visual appearance exerts a high appealing influence on children and adults, for all ages. Landi, P. (2009), an advertising expert on both the internet and the television world, aware of the dangers it brings to the development of the child, says: *I have the impression that younger generations today are really slaves of technological consumptions. In other words, it is a compulsive, sickly way of consuming things, which then leads to the consumption of life itself, rather than living it.* To protect children from the hazards that bring technology equipment, just keep it under constant control when standing next to a computer or TV.

Methodology

The methodology used in this study is qualitative. Part of the study are 20 children with special needs of school age, 6–15 years old, who attend public education and receive therapeutic services in the “Future For You” therapeutic center in the city of Elbasan. The period of study concerns from September 2017 to February 2018. The instruments used in the study are semi-structured interviews with mothers of those children with special needs to explore the reporting that mothers give about the impact of technology on their children. Another instrument used is the observation of children in their behaviors during the teaching and therapeutic classes. The interviews used with the parents consist of 10 open questions of argumentation nature. The children studied were observed during the therapeutic hours they receive each day and in schools in conjunction with the peers to observe if elements of their behavior are affected by technology both positively and negatively.

In order to achieve the results of the study, initial analysis of the interviews with the parents was conducted and then the observation data realized with the children with special needs were analyzed. The qualitative approach of the study is more realistic (Broun & Clarke, 2006) and does not adhere to any particular study paradigm in general. Qualitative analysis is used as a practical and useful search tool that can provide us with detailed data. Twenty interviews, ($n = 20$) with parents of children asked about the use of technological means by their children, such as television, smart phony etc, and their impact on them were analyzed.

Results and Discussions

The findings according to parents' interview.

The first interview question is: Is your child exposed to the use of technological tools? All interviewed parents or 100% of them reported that their children were very exposed to the use of technology tools. According to them, their children spent many hours watching various television programs.

The second interview question is: Is the program TV or games on the phones followed by your children chosen by you or by them? Only 65% of parents reported that the TV programs or the games are chosen by themselves. The children with special needs have the predisposition to become addictive and stereotypical in the programs they see. Parents selected educational and stimulating programs for the children. One parent reported that:

My son likes to see comic programs all the time, he has a down syndrome and he likes to become a comedian when he grows up, we like this because he imitates very well and modeling positive behaviors.

While, 35% of parents reported that they could not control their children on choosing programs TV because the children like to follow their preferred program. Parents claim they can't come up against the child's request.

One parent reported that:

It is impossible for us to persuade him to see another program, he likes a puppet movie and will never change it. The boy has autism, this behavior is his stereotype every day will see the same program and play the same games, and the boy repeatedly repeats the phrase of the programs he sees.

Regarding the question how the uncontrolled use of technological tools affects your child behavior result that 75% of parents responded that having a child with special needs has made their life more difficult. So often the children try to realize in the real life what they watch on tele-

vision. They have a tendency to become addicted on certain games and television programs. Parents often try to use the technological tools in order to improve the positive behavior of their children. But the violence expressed on some TV programs encourages children to the negative behaviors that they can't manage because they do not understand correctly.

While, the controlled use the technological tools has positive impact on child behavior. More than 80% of parents reported that the use of television and smart phones had a positive impact on their children. Their children with special needs had modeled many positive behaviors from educational programs and also had reinforced some imitative skills. So, for example the games that promote creativity has helped them to gain and improve some of their skills. The children were encouraged to have imaginings and models. Many of them were asking their parents to go for swimming, music, piano lessons, because they had puppet heroes or TV shows and wanted to be like them. Also, various programs helped them to express their emotions.

Regarding the management of use technological tools parents reported that they are responsible for that; however, 50% of them need the special help from school and therapeutic service center in order to teach how to learn and demonstrate the positive behaviors using technological tools.

The children with special needs were observed during individual and group therapeutic classes and in public school, related to their behavior and the emotions they showed during the interaction with peers. The observation showed that the children performed different behaviors during interaction with their friends. According to parents those behaviors were as a result of the watching different TV programs. Also the proper use of educational programs was beneficial to children with special needs, especially those with Down syndrome who have a highly developed visual memory.

Conclusions

The exposure of children with special needs in front of the use of technological tools has some positive impacts if the exposure time is appropriate and well managed by their parents and guardians.

In these circumstances they fulfill their potentials, improve learning, model behaviors, and imitate positive behaviors. Also, children with special needs can recognize and manage in proper way their emotions.

Recommendations

Parents in cooperation with specialist should observe and decide about the time and the technological tools to which their children will be exposed.

Schools and therapeutic centers should be equipped with digital charts to develop different skills in children with special needs.

The respective institutions should build national strategies to develop learning with modern methods through technology.

Proper TV mechanisms should consider the target group with special needs in what they transmit.

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