On the Importance of Parents' Mediations and Perceptions as Predictors of Children's Digital Game-based Language Learning

Golia Mohammadi[*]

Corresponding Author, Department of English Language and Literature, Persian Gulf University, Bushehr, Iran.

golia_mohammadi@yahoo.com

Abstract:

Digital games have become more widespread in recent years, and children's interest in them has significantly changed their learning habits. The growing popularity of digital games makes them an essential tool for homebound language learning. Hence, parents' mediations and practices play a vital role in directing children's education, and their mediation might open up various opportunities. In this quantitative study, parents' mediation and perception of digital games were explored through questionnaires. The results revealed that parents mostly favored 'instructive mediation,' 'conscious co-playing mediation,' and 'restrictive mediation.' The correlational analysis of parents' attitude scale with parents' mediation scale revealed that parents' attitude toward digital games is predictive of parents' mediation. Therefore, parents who favor digital games applied 'instructive' and 'conscious co-playing' mediations. However, parents with negative attitudes applied 'restrictive' mediation. The results revealed that it is important to make parents aware about the educational potential of digital games and shape their attitudes. This study has significant implications for policymakers and early childhood educators to plan for family education regarding the educational potential of digital games. Also, these findings guide the prevention and intervention of other technological devices related to children and adolescents.

1. Introduction

Today, technology is a critical component of learning, enhancing children's social and cognitive skills (Islim et al., 2021; Sivrikova et al., 2020; Tafazoli, 2022). Recent technological advances have significantly affected education (Islim et al., 2021; Mohammadi & Tafazoli, 2022). Among technological advancements, the interest in digital educational games is gaining momentum (Stephen, 2020). However, gaming behavior is a double-edged sword with advantages and disadvantages (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2019). On the positive side, educational games develop children's literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills (Moon et al., 2019). On the negative side, parents are concerned that time spent on gaming limits real-life social interaction and physical activity (Ferguson et al., 2015). Researchers identified that children are unaware of the time spent on games and gaming habits (e.g., Przybylski & Weinstein, 2019). Excessive time spent on gaming has adverse consequences like poor academic performance and harms social and psychological well-being in the long run (Malik et al., 2016; Tur-Porcar, 2017).

With increasingly digitalized classrooms, we should be concerned about the influence of digital games on children as they may not have self-regulatory behavior. Thus, the concern in today's children's education is not whether to use technology. Instead, proper management of its use is the focus of attention. There is a growing concern among stakeholders and calls for action to protect children from the negative consequences of digital games (Malik et al., 2020; Pallini et al., 2018). In this regard, parents, as the first socialization agent, have a prominent role in protecting children. Parents must guide, monitor, and protect their children (Gözüm & Kandır, 2021). However, factors like attitudes, socioeconomic status, and socio-cultural knowledge might influence parents' mediation of digital educational games (Chou et al., 2016; Gong & Piller, 2017).

Since digital technology has a prominent role in children's education and affects their future life, it is essential to explore how parents mediate it. Parents' attitudes and strategies that establish mediation must be studied to ensure children's effective technology usage. Parents' mediations include safeguarding their children while they use technology effectively (Islim et al., 2021). Thus, maximizing children's technology use while protecting them from possible risks is critical to parents' mediation. Considering calls from researchers (e.g., Gözüm & Kandır, 2021; Hadad et al., 2020; Islim et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2021), the importance of parents' mediation must be explored to assist parents in navigating the challenges of increasing technology opportunities and accessibility and

providing parents with the skills and education needed to deal with the growing opportunities.

Few studies on parents mediation have been conducted in the context of Singapore (Choo et al., 2015), China (Liau et al., 2015), and South Korea (Kim & Kim, 2015). There appears to be a need for more agreement on which parent mediation is popular in other contexts like Iran. Furthermore, many other studies are conducted with diverse age groups, making it compulsory to explore the most common types of mediation among Iranian parents of school-aged children. Also, the literature is silent in exploring the relationship between game-based language learning and socialization agent like parents and descriptions or evaluations of using mediation at home.

Because parents have such an essential role in shaping students' and educators' attitudes toward gaming (Gong & Piller, 2017), I believe that exploring differences in parents' opinions and attitudes will provide valuable insight into how parents can assist educators and researchers in advocating for digital games in the classroom. Hence, exploring parental perceptions and mediations concerning digital games might provide a sound basis for understanding how educators, administrators, and researchers can influence the acceptance of digital games in children's education. Therefore, this research is critical as it discusses and compares parents' mediation. Thus, the researcher formulated the following research questions:

1. What mediation strategies, if any, are used by parents to track their children's playing of educational digital games?
2. How are parents' perceptions toward digital games related to various mediation strategies?

2. Literature Review

Parents' Mediations

Parents are the most influential people in developing children's skills and are the primary guide in using digital games (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Parents are the key agents of socialization who help the child across a wide range of areas, like acquiring knowledge (Konok et al., 2020). Also, parents are the primary facilitators, teachers, and gatekeepers of digital games for education (DeCamp & Ferguson, 2017). Parental role in using digital games is even more prominent than the government as a regulator, media industry, and schools due to the multiple functionalities of games and their use by very young children in personalized

settings. Scholars termed the parental role in regulating children's playing digital games parental mediation (Nikken & Jansz, 2014). Parents may employ several mediations. The use of digital games by children is mediated through (1) imposing limitations both in the game's content and the level of exposure, (2) parent-child discussion on digital games' content and an appropriate way of playing games, and (3) sharing game experience in a parent-child relationship. These are called restrictive, active, and co-use mediation (Martins et al., 2017; Nikken & Jansz, 2014). Parental mediation has brought many advantages, like reduced exposure to inappropriate digital materials for children and growing awareness of games content (Lee & Chae, 2007). Various studies have proven the significant role of parents' mediation (Gong & Piller, 2017; Islim et al., 2021; Kim & Kim, 2015). Scholars (e.g., Kousari et al., 2017; Livingstone et al., 2017; Piotrowski, 2017) found that parents are mainly involved in restrictive and active parental mediation. In a study by Livingstone et al. (2017), factor analysis revealed two mediation strategies. Both enabling mediation and restrictive mediation were evident among European countries. The enabling mediation was employed when the parent or child was relatively digitally skilled, so it may not support harm.

In contrast, restrictive mediation was associated with fewer online risks but at the cost of opportunities. Kousari et al. (2017) found that children's gaming experiences are more likely to be mediated by parents concerned with its harmful effects. Also, educated parents applied more restrictive mediation.

Although parents usually mediate the children's playing games, it does not mean that parents practice the same parental mediation. Hence, it is important to investigate the influential factors underlying parents' medication strategies to gain deeper insights. Research showed that more educated parents use active or restrictive mediation while less educated ones employ co-playing mediation (Nikken & Jansz, 2014). In the traditional and digital contexts, demographic variables alone cannot justify parents' mediation strategies. Other factors like parents' perceptions should also be taken into account. Parents' attitudes toward certain activities predict children's success in those activities (Konok et al., 2020). Understanding parental perceptions, attitudes, and other contextual factors concerning digital games may provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

The Educational Potential of Digital Games in Language Education

Digital games greatly facilitate learning and instruction (Mete, 2021). Much research investigated the influence of digital games on children's academic performance (Mete, 2021; Rasti-Behbahani, 2021; Serra & Gilabert, 2021). For example, Rasti-Behbahani (2021) claimed that games benefit learning and retention. Also, Thompson and Gillern (2020) discussed the benefit of games in vocabulary learning. They claimed that games are beneficial for vocabulary acquisition. Zou et al. (2021) compared the traditional methods and learning vocabulary through digital games. They found the effectiveness of early language learning with digital games. They claimed that with digital games, children would quickly understand language. They also explored that games create a learner-centered environment and positively affect learning. Also, Yu and Tsuei (2022) investigated game-based language learning and proved that digital games provide motivation and pleasure for learners.

Digital games have attracted children and provided them with learning, relaxation, participation, expression, and communication opportunities. However, this facilitating factor has its challenges. The controversial issue about digital games is whether the content of educational digital games to be offered to children is genuinely educational (Gözüm & Kandır, 2021). It may pose some risks since some games are inappropriate for young children (Papadakis & Kalogiannakis, 2017). Scholars (e.g., Papadakis et al., 2018) highlighted the deficiencies in educational digital games. In Bratitsis's (2017) research, 39 out of 248 digital applications were found unsuitable for the specific age group and had poor educational value, even though many applications had appropriate language learning content.

3. Method

The study's primary aim was to explore parents' mediations and perceptions of the educational potentials of digital game-based language learning. In this study, two questionnaires were employed to analyze parents' favorite mediation strategies in digital game-based language learning and parents' perceptions of the educational potential of games. The purpose of quantitative research was to attain deeper knowledge and understanding of the social world. Researchers use quantitative methods to observe situations or events that affect people. Quantitative analysis produces objective data that can be communicated

through statistics and numbers. Also, how parents' attitudes toward games influenced parents' mediation was investigated.

3.1. Participants

In total, 56 parents aged 27-45 participated (see Table 1). They were recruited through convenience sampling since the researcher sought to work with families of advanced classes of society who were perceived to have the ability to afford and access digital games at home and have children between twelve to fourteen years old. The researcher gave them gift cards after completing the questionnaires to acknowledge the participants' time and energy in attending the research.

Table 1
Demographic data of participants

Category	Subcategories	Number	Percentage%
Gender	Male	17	30.4 %
	Female	39	69.6%
	25-30	2	3.6%
Age	31-35	16	28.6%
	36-40	21	37.5%
	41-45	17	30.3%

3.2. Instruments

Questionnaires
Parents' Digital Games Mediations Questionnaire

The parents' mediation questionnaire was adapted from the study by Livingstone et al. (2011). The items used in this study have been modified to serve the purpose of this research. The questionnaire was administered in Farsi, the official language of Iran. The questionnaire began with a description of the study's intent, and instructions followed each question. It consisted of 8 subscales with 34 items. Through a 5-point Likert scale, the researcher examined eight parents' mediation toward digital games; four items for active mediation, four items for active mediation of internet safety, four items for technical controls, six items for parental restrictions, four items for parental monitoring, five items for

conscious co-playing, four items for evaluative mediation and three items for instructive mediation. The alpha reliability coefficient of each subscale was estimated: active mediation ($a = .72$), active mediation of internet safety ($a = .74$), technical controls ($a = .73$), parental restrictions ($a = .84$), parental monitoring ($a = .80$), conscious co-playing ($a = .93$), evaluative mediation ($a = .79$), instructive mediation ($a = .92$). This scale (questionnaire A) was validated through convergent and discriminate validity to ensure construct validity. To measure convergent validity, the questionnaire developed by Kousari et al. (2017) (questionnaire B), and to measure discriminate validity, the questionnaire developed by Hakimzade et al. (2014) (questionnaire C) was used. The results showed that questionnaire A strongly correlates with questionnaire B [r= +.69, p<.001]. Also, the results showed that questionnaire A has a strong negative correlation with questionnaire C [r = -.61, p<.001].

Parents' Attitude toward Digital Games Questionnaire

The attitude questionnaire was a 5-point Likert scale with eleven items adapted from Vittrup et al. (2016) on parental perceptions of the educational potential of digital games. The original 11 items were modified to fit the research question. A group of five experts was invited to assess the content validity of the questionnaires. These experts provided comments and suggestions for improvements after analyzing the draft questionnaires. Numerous refinements were then made to the questionnaires. The alpha reliability coefficient of this scale was = .97. This scale (questionnaire D) was validated through convergent and discriminate validity to ensure construct validity. To measure convergent validity, the questionnaire developed by Kousari et al. (2017) (questionnaire B), and to measure discriminate validity, the questionnaire developed by Yadollahi et al. (2021) (questionnaire E) were used. The results showed that questionnaire D strongly correlates with questionnaire B [r= + .74, p<.001]. Also, the results showed that questionnaire D has a strong negative correlation with questionnaire E [r= -.59, p<.001].

3.3. Procedure

The teacher assigned the volunteers playing a digital game as a further assignment at home. The game's contents had to be aligned with the English language course students took at school. After many consultations with teachers, *The Clue Finders Reading Adventures: The Mystery of the Missing Amulet game (The Learning Company)* was assigned. The teachers took the relevance and

difficulty level of the game into consideration and confirmed its appropriateness. They continued to play the game during the whole semester at home. At the end of the semester, each child brought home a copy of the consent form and questionnaires. Parents eager to participate in the study completed the consent forms and the questionnaires and returned them to school. Generally, forty parents returned the questionnaires. The average length of completion was thirty minutes.

3.4. Data Analyses

Descriptive statistics of different types of parental mediation were reported by mean analysis to respond to the first research question. To answer the second research question, the researcher applied Spearman's correlation coefficient test to measure the correlation between parents' perceptions of digital games and the most popular mediation. The data were analyzed through SPSS 19 statistical software.

4. Results

RQ1: What mediation strategies, if any, are used by Iranian parents to track their children's playing of educational digital games?

The extent of parents' consensus with different mediation strategies was explored using a five-point scale. From the mean score (see Table 2), it can be inferred that parents most favored 'conscious co-playing mediation.' This mediation was measured with five items related to 'play games with my child for critical evaluation,' 'propose a new app, website, or games to my child,' 'provide affordance with a new app or game,' 'explain to him/her how to use digital games,' and 'choose games which we both like together.' According to the results, most parents (62%) 'strongly agreed' and 'agreed' to employ conscious co-playing mediation to manage their children's digital game-playing. It was common to exercise conscious co-playing mediation by providing affordance with a new app or game. Also, 20% of parents' strongly agreed' and 50% 'agreed' to employ conscious co-playing mediation by providing affordance during play.

Restrictive mediation was the second most common mediation strategy. It was measured with six items related to 'use the internet for online gaming,' 'play games with other people online,' 'use a webcam while playing games, ' 'play games limitlessly and without a definite schedule,' 'use digital technology

at a specific time of the day or week,' and 'play certain video games only.' Results revealed that 73% of the participants strongly agreed or agreed to employ a restrictive strategy to manage children's digital gaming.

The third popular strategy was 'instructive mediation,' centering around providing children with critical remarks. Parents pointed out the drawbacks of digital games, like their effect on poor exam results. Instructive mediation was measured with three items related to 'warning the child about negative effects of gaming,' 'telling that games are just fantasy,' and 'critically analyzing the game content'. Obtained data showed that 36% of the participants 'strongly agreed' and 33% 'agreed' that they use instructive mediation to manage children's playing digital games.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Different Types of Parental Mediations

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Error	Std. Deviation
Digital parental styles						
Active mediation	40	5.00	11.00	8.9000	.22014	1.39229
Active mediation of internet safety	40	8.00	12.00	10.0750	.20377	1.28876
Technical control	40	7.00	12.00	10.2000	.24859	1.57219
Parental monitoring	40	8.00	12.00	10.0250	.20720	1.31046
Conscious co-playing	40	7.00	23.00	17.7250	.77044	4.87267
Evaluative mediation	40	6.00	12.00	9.5500	.25306	1.60048
Parents restrictions	40	9.00	20.00	13.3750	.48923	3.09414
Instructive mediation	40	6.00	15.00	11.6500	.49296	3.11777
Valid N (list-wise)	40					

RQ2: How is the perception of parents toward digital games related to various mediation strategies?

Parents' perceptions were measured through eleven items. The combination of items formed parents' attitudes toward digital games questionnaire. Negatively worded items like ('Children under the age of 10 years should not play digital games') were reverse scored before summing the scores with a mean of 37.85 (standard deviation (SD) =12.80).

Results showed (see Table 3) that 19% of the participants 'strongly agreed' and 44% 'agreed' that digital games are beneficial and provide children with affordances. Interestingly, 25% of parents 'strongly agreed' and 42% 'agreed' with the claim that digital games at a young age are vital for early brain development. Also, some parents (60%) favored only educational games and restricted game content to only educational ones. Furthermore, 65% of the Iranian parents highlighted physical, emotional, and intellectual development through digital games. A large group of parents (67%) believed that children could be well-prepared for tomorrow's workforce thanks to digital games. On the other hand, some parents had a negative view of the educational potential of games.

The researcher applied Spearman's correlation coefficient test to measure the correlation between parents' perceptions of digital games and the most popular mediations (restrictive, conscious co-playing, and instructive mediation). A preliminary analysis was conducted to ensure no violation of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity assumptions. There was a strong positive correlation between the instructive [r= .94, n=40, p<.0005] and conscious co-playing mediations [r= .90, n=40, p<.0005] with parents' attitude. As indicated in Table 4, it is evident that parents who had a more positive attitude and embraced digital games employed more conscious co-playing and instructive mediations.

However, a strong negative correlation was found between parents' attitudes and restrictive mediation strategies [r= -.83, n=40, p<.0005]. Hence, parents who did not believe in the educational potential of digital games used more restrictive mediation

Table 3
Parental Perceptions of the Educational Potentials of Digital Games

Statements	Agree	Disagree
Digital games at a young age (6-9) are vital for early brain development.	67%	25%
A child will not fall behind other children academically if digital games are restricted in the early years (6-9 years).	57%	30%
Children under the age of 10 years should have no game screen time.	60%	30%
Children under the age of 10 years should only play educational games.	60%	25%
The use of digital games can promote long-term physical, emotional, or intellectual development.	65%	27%
Introducing digital games at a young age prepares children better for tomorrow's workforce.	67%	30%
Children's use of digital games damages their brains.	55%	30%
Digital games are harmful to children's development.	65%	30%
Children do not need to know how to play digital games for their education.	67%	27%
Traditional educational materials are better than digital educational games.	70%	30%
Digital educational games do not support children's learning.	67%	30%

Table 4
The Correlational analysis of Parents' Perception of Digital Games with the Three Popular Mediations

		Parents' perceptions
Total conscious co-playing	Pearson Correlation	.909**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	40
Total parents restrictions	Pearson Correlation	-.836**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	40
Total instructive mediation	Pearson Correlation	.945**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	40

5. Discussion

Current research findings indicated that parents mainly employed 'restrictive mediation,' 'instructive mediation,' and 'conscious co-playing mediation.' These choices might be due to parents' socioeconomic status, digital literacy, and attitudes. Among these factors, we sought to discover parents' perceptions to get an in-depth insight regarding their mediation. The results showed that parents who attributed harm and risks to digital games imposed more restrictions. Parents' negative conceptions of digital games might be attributed to

risks like access to inappropriate content, health problems, anxiety disorders, depression, loneliness, obesity, and aggression.

Thus, parents restricted children by limiting their screen time, their children could not play games limitlessly, and there was some schedule for that. Parents also restricted the games' contents. This result corroborates with the study by Gong and Piller (2017), who found a positive association between the negative attitudes that digital games have an adverse social impact and restrictions. They claimed that restrictions might stem from the attitude that digital games potentially negatively affect children's development. Regarding online activities, Chen et al. (2018) found a positive relationship between parents' active and restrictive mediation. Parents' awareness of the potential risks due to getting to know their children's online activities heightened restrictive mediation. Their study provided evidence that restrictive and active mediations are not applied independently. They also proved that parents' active or restrictive mediations protect children's well-being in online activities.

Contrary to the restrictive parents were those who valued the positive educational outcomes of digital games in terms of emergent literacy and disposition to learn. Among them, 'instructive mediation' was dominant, and the children were warned against the downside effect of the games. Parents spend a significant amount of time critically analyzing the game contents and be confident that the game has fundamental educational purposes. The third most popular category of mediation was 'conscious co-playing,' in which parents critically analyze the game content by playing with children. Some parents provided affordances and guidance when children needed assistance. This result is in line with the study by Gözüm and Kandır (2021), who claimed that parents guide the educational content of games through co-playing. Parents assumed that children were safe in light of their co-playing mediation. Parents might contribute to children's development by acting as role models for the intended use of digital games. Hence, parents' technology awareness and conscious co-playing mediation might increase children's safe technological usage.

Accordingly, parents influence children's playing digital games via their attitudes, perceptions, role-modeling, and parenting styles. Positive or negative attitudes determine parents' policies toward digital games. These results corroborate the findings of Konok et al. (2020), who found that positive attitudes toward technology heightened children's media consumption. Parental attitudes might stem from potential benefits and negative consequences parents attribute to digital games. Highly educated parents might be more aware of digital games'

negative effects and consider this in their mediation. Although, parents should mediate digital games consciously to support children's development.

Considering 21st-century skills, parents' conscious practices toward digital games may contribute to the open-ended effect of technological tools. In light of these results, parents' effective guidance leads to children being positively supported. Thus, parents should be informed of the educational potential of games and effective communication ways. Parents should receive technology-oriented education and be aware of how they should behave when their children play digital games. Hence, family education might be integrated into school programs to foster children's development. This issue is supported by Islim et al. (2021). They found that digitally literate parents were aware of the educational potential of technology, like development in a foreign language, math, concept learning, creative thinking, problem-solving skills, and hand-based skills. Therefore, interactions between parents and children reduce the common adverse effects of digital games and promote game-based learning (Livingstone & Franklin, 2018). The results confirmed that parents need evidence-based guidelines to help their children.

6. Conclusion and Implications

The findings revealed that parents' attitudes toward digital games determined parents' mediation. It was evident that parents who did not believe in the educational potential of games showed more resistance and imposed restrictions. Thus, it is important to make parents aware of the pedagogical affordances of digital games (Barandiarán et al., 2019). Recognizing the educational potential of games might reduce parental resistance toward digital games. Parental involvement in digital games is a significant issue since it influences children's academic success. This study raised several implications to inform educational policymakers and future research about the significance of parents' attitudes. The findings are significant for primary and early childhood educators and parents.

Despite the contribution of the present study to children's education, it should be considered in light of several limitations. Broad generalizations from the data are not allowed due to the small sample size. Next, the study is based on self-report instruments. Conducting research and employing an observational method might give a better and deep impression of the issue. Another avenue for future research is to conduct an experimental study to employ some interventions to use digital games as an out-of-class homework activity. A further worthy road for more research is considering the impact of socioeconomic statuses like

education level, income, and marital status on parents' acceptance of digital games. Future studies might expand on our results and consider the family's digital literacy when exploring parents' mediation.

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اهمیت میانجی‌گری و نگرش والدین به عنوان پیش‌بینی‌کننده‌های یادگیری زبان انگلیسی مبتنی بر بازی‌های دیجیتال در کودکان (پژوهشی)

گلیا محمدی*

نویسندهٔ مسئول، دانش آموختهٔ کارشناس ارشد آموزش زبان انگلیسی، دانشگاه خلیج فارس بوشهر

golia_mohammadi@yahoo.com

چکیده:

بازی‌های دیجیتال، در سال‌های اخیر گسترش بیشتری یافته و علاقهٔ کودکان به آن، عادات یادگیری‌شان را به‌میزان قابل توجهی تغییر داده است. محبوبیت روزافزون بازی‌های دیجیتال، آن‌ها را به ابزاری ضروری، برای یادگیری زبان به‌صورت خانگی تبدیل می‌کند. از این رو، میانجی‌گری‌ها و اقدامات والدین، نقش حیاتی در جهت‌دهی به آموزش کودکان ایفا می‌کند و میانجی‌گری آن‌ها ممکن است، فرصت‌های مختلفی را ایجاد کند. در این مطالعهٔ کمی، میانجی‌گری و درک والدین از بازی‌های دیجیتال، از طریق پرسشنامه مورد بررسی قرار گرفت. نتایج نشان داد که والدین، عمدتاً «میانجی‌گری آموزنده»، «میانجی‌گری هم‌بازی آگاهانه» و «میانجی‌گری محدودکننده» را ترجیح می‌دهند. تحلیل همبستگی مقیاس نگرش والدین، با مقیاس میانجی‌گری والدین، نشان داد که نگرش والدین نسبت به بازی‌های دیجیتال، پیش‌بینی کنندهٔ میانجی‌گری والدین است. بنابراین، والدینی که طرفدار بازی‌های دیجیتالی هستند، میانجی‌گری «آموزنده» و «هم‌بازی آگاهانه» را اعمال کردند. با این حال، والدین با نگرش منفی از میانجی‌گری «محدود کننده» استفاده کردند. نتایج نشان داد که آگاه کردن والدین از پتانسیل آموزشی بازی‌های دیجیتال و شکل دادن به نگرش‌های آن‌ها، مهم است. این مطالعه، پیامدهای قابل توجهی برای سیاست‌گذاران و مربیان دارد تا برای آموزش خانواده، با توجه به پتانسیل آموزشی بازی‌های دیجیتال، برنامه‌ریزی کنند. همچنین، این یافته‌ها، راهنمای پیشگیری و مداخلهٔ سایر فناوری‌های مربوط به کودکان و نوجوانان است.

کلیدواژه‌ها:

بازی‌های دیجیتالی، میانجی‌گری والدین، آموزش در دوران کودکی، بازی‌های آموزشی