

The Effectiveness of Teaching Media Literacy to Parents with an Emphasis on Mothers' Harmful Use of the Internet and Their Children's Critical Thinking

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Abstract

Aim: The purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of teaching media literacy curriculum for parents on mothers' harmful use of the Internet and their children's critical thinking skills. The present quasi-experimental research was conducted with a pre-test-post-test design and a control group. The statistical population consisted of primary school students in Isfahan, Iran, in 2023, along with their mothers. Of these, 30 mother-student pairs were selected by convenience sampling and randomly allocated into an experimental and a control group. The mothers were asked to complete the Critical Thinking Questionnaire (CTQ) about their child and the Internet Abusive Use Questionnaire (IAUQ) about themselves. Then, the mothers from the experimental group were trained based on a special media literacy curriculum for parents with elementary school children, while the control group did not receive any training for a semester. The data were analyzed in SPSS software version 26 using ANCOVA. The results showed that offering a special media literacy curriculum to parents over one school semester can significantly reduce the harmful use of the Internet by mothers and increase critical thinking skills in their children ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, it is recommended that parents be trained on media literacy.

Keywords: *Teaching media literacy curriculum for parents, problematic use of the Internet, critical thinking, elementary school*

Introduction

The Internet can be beneficial if used optimally, but it can also have harmful effects if used improperly (Liu et al., 2023). Although the adverse consequences of harmful Internet use have been demonstrated, few studies have examined the harmful use of the Internet in adults, although the prevalence of this phenomenon has been estimated as 4 to 35.8 percent among mothers. This issue therefore requires further scrutiny (Sakakihara et al., 2019). Zhu et al. (2022) reported that harmful Internet use affects parent-child interactions and can cause many problems for children (Habibi-Kaleybar & Bahadorikhosroshahi, 2019). Poor critical thinking is one of the adverse impacts of harmful Internet use, and parents who have weak critical thinking skills most likely cannot succeed in teaching this skill to their children. Therefore, weak critical thinking can be considered one of the problems faced by the children of mothers with harmful Internet use. In order to promote critical thinking in the children of these mothers, interventions are necessary on critical thinking skills (Taji & Dibai Saber, 2023) as well as the management of Internet use, and in this context, teaching media literacy to parents in the form of a curriculum has been highly recommended (Jaafari, 2017). Given that no curriculum exists regarding teaching mothers how to provide their children with media literacy and skills, this research was conducted to improve

children's media literacy through training mothers in order to assess the effectiveness of parents' media literacy curriculum on mothers' harmful use of the Internet and their children's critical thinking.

Methodology

The present quasi-experimental study was conducted with a pretest-posttest design and a control group. The statistical population consisted of primary school students in Isfahan, Iran, in 2023, along with their mothers. To select samples from the six school districts of Isfahan, two districts, and four primary schools from each district, were randomly selected and assigned as experimental or control groups by drawing lots. The mothers were asked to complete the Critical Thinking Questionnaire (CTQ) about their child and the Internet Abusive Use Questionnaire (IAUQ) about themselves. The mothers from the experimental group were trained based on a special media literacy curriculum for parents with elementary school children, while the control group did not receive any training. Finally, after the end of the academic semester, the post-test was administered. The statistical analysis of the data was performed in SPSS software, version 26, using ANCOVA.

Results

After adjusting for the pretest scores in both groups, the effect of the special media literacy curriculum for parents with elementary school children on the mothers' problematic use of the Internet and the children's critical thinking was significant, and this curriculum reduced the mothers' harmful use of the Internet and improved their children's critical thinking. The effect size shows that 53.9% of the difference in Internet trauma and 38.6% of the difference in critical thinking between the control and experimental groups were caused by the special media literacy curriculum offered to the parents.

Table 1. Mean, standard deviation and univariate analysis of covariance for the effects of special media literacy curriculum for parents with elementary school children

Objective	Group	Pretest Mean	Posttest	f	sig	Impact factor
Problematic use	Experimental	29.20	25.86	31.566	0.0001	0.539
	Control	30.53	30.73			
Critical thinking	Experimental	49.13	54.93	16.950	0.0001	0.386
	Control	50.33	50.20			

Discussion and conclusion

The results showed that offering a special media literacy curriculum to parents over one school semester can reduce the harmful use of the Internet by mothers and increase critical thinking skills in their children. This part of the results can be considered indirectly aligned with the research by Metwally-Ramadan (2022) and Mendoza (2019). Since this research was conducted on elementary school students in Isfahan along with their mothers, the generalization of the results to other groups is limited. The lack of follow-up was one of the limitations of the present study. In line with the mentioned limitations, similar studies are recommended to be conducted in other cities with different cultures to provide a basis for comparison. In addition, future researchers are suggested to investigate the long-term effects of this program. Given the positive effects of the special media literacy curriculum offered to these parents and the resultant reduction in the mothers' harmful use of the Internet and their children's improved critical thinking, and considering the importance of promoting media literacy in Iranian families and the targets of the 2024 National Education Transformation Program, i.e., promoting the educational role of the family and their effective participation in the public education system, educational authorities are recommended to incorporate such training as a compulsory extracurricular program in elementary schools.

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