

Effect of Television on Children

Argumentative Essay Example

Introduction

There has been an ongoing debate on the effect of television on children. However, research on the pros and cons of watching television for kids and their watching habits has been done. The questions are many, what is the effect of television on children of different ages? When is the effect greatest? How can the benefits be maximized while minimizing the detrimental effects? This paper will dwell on the general effect of television on children under the age of five. It will cover both the supervised and unsupervised effects.

Nowadays, children have more access to television than it was ever experienced (Pecora 3). Approximately every home has at least one television set with others having them in the children's rooms. This means that more children are watching unsupervised television over long periods of time (Wasko 57). The age children are exposed to television has also decreased.

How Much Is too Much?

The question of how much television is enough has been going on for a while with the general agreement that the lesser the better. However, there has not been a clear agreement despite the American Academy of Pediatrics recommending that children under the age of two should not be exposed to any television (Johnson 44). There are numerous reasons for discouraging heavy television viewing, including risk of obesity, language issues, and problems with attention and mathematics proficiency (Large 3). To understand the effects of television requires the knowledge on how children learn. Direct interaction with humans, especially the parent or guardian, plays an important role in the child's development of social, cognitive, and

emotional skills. In addition to this, brain growth is also enhanced. Heavy television impedes interaction thus hampering healthy growth (John 45).

Factors Affecting Response

When a child spends a lot of time at home, lives in a home where a lot of television is watched, or has a set in the bedroom, this translates to a lot of television. Age also plays a role with preschoolers watching more television than their younger counterparts do. The age, social status, and level of education of the guardian living with the child also matter, as young parents tend to have kids watching more television. Parents or guardians who are not well off or with low education also fall under the same category. However, children view less television under different circumstances.

According to Susan Linn of Harvard Medical School, the risk of being obese for preschoolers' increases with every hour of television watched per day. This risk increases to about 31% if they have the sets in their rooms (John 45). Linn argues that this is due to the number of commercials they are exposed to, which encourage junk food and the lack of time to play.

The effects of television depend on the child's personal characteristics, which include age and linguistic maturity. This is especially true for benefits as there is evidence to prove that when children watch materials meant for adults, the effects become detrimental. For instance, they have poor language development. When the exposure is increased, they end up having lower vocabulary, inferior expressive language, and lesser engagement in television talk with adults. Television talk with adults is important as it sheds light on what was confusing or likely to be misinterpreted. Children can also learn new meaning to words they did not understand. This eventually leads to benefits of children's attention to television.

Problems Associated with Television

Another problem associated with television, especially when it concerns unsupervised effect, is the amount of inappropriate material to which they are exposed. This can eventually lead to antisocial behaviors such as aggression among other behavioral problems. The children are exposed to too much too soon at an age when they cannot make informed decisions. This is especially true when it comes to unsupervised viewing. With the number of available channels soaring, so do the levels of exposure. Children want to imitate what they hear or see without an idea of what most of it means (Close 43).

Regardless of the children's age, if they live in an environment where there is constant watching of television, they tend to consume more time watching and as a result have less time to read compared with other children. Similar issue concerns all types of parents regardless of age, social status, and education. With this type of environment, the parents spend less time with their children; and since growth is based on direct interaction, it inevitably suffers. The gender of the child also matters with boys being more affected and likely to imitate violent scenes they see on television.

Benefits of Television

However, not all television has a bad influence on children. A research proved that for children between the ages of two and five, there were positive effects of exposure to quality material (Close 42). There were benefits in their expressive language, receptive vocabulary, and storytelling. Some of the materials that were considered beneficial were *Sesame Street* and other shows that contained a lot of singing. There was also improvement in letter-sound knowledge, attention, and comprehension in the children. The benefits were attributed to the programs that encouraged talk.

According to language specialists, songs, rhymes, book reading, imaginative plays, and parental interaction and conversations have the most positive impact on the development of children (Close 42). This develops their neural pathways, which are important for positive education. Consequently, they need exposure to language and sounds and interactions with adults and environment.

Exposure to quality materials such as *Sesame Street* for children who were between the ages of two and three had higher chances of scoring highly on measures of language, math, and reading for school at five (Van Evra 18). From these studies, it was evident that quality material includes age appropriateness, education nature of the material, and supervision. A combination of these also enhances grammar, literacy knowledge, and phonological awareness.

Although there were many benefits from these materials, there is little evidence to suggest that they are as beneficial to children who are younger than two years old. Children of this age group received more knowledge from their environment including interaction between guardians, as opposed to television. This supports the following recommendation given by the American Academy of Pediatrics: children under two years old should not have any television, as they are no evidence of supporting any purported benefits.

Research demonstrated that the type of exposure a child obtained during pre-schooling can indicate academic performance during adolescence. Teenagers, who were exposed to less educational programs and more entertainment television (especially the violent one) when they were younger, had lower grades. On the other hand, children who were permitted by their parents to watch more educational programs and less entertainment television had higher grades, were more creative, put more worth on achievement, and read more books (Murrow 7).

Programs that are beneficial to children offer them with opportunities for language development. They should contain the content appropriate to the age, include both new and familiar words, be interactive, and have the potential of adult co-viewing and teaching, which can be achieved by having interesting materials that will encourage adults (Van Evra 18). They should also have as little as possible visual and auditory stimuli, in case they are meant for infants, and use some sophisticated language. Emphasis is put on little visual stimuli because it does not develop the part of the brain that is responsible for language (Close 45). On the contrary, programs that are detrimental to children offer a lot of visual and auditory stimuli for children under the age of two and have complex stories with language-poor content.

Conclusion

Although there are many effects of television on children, it is here to stay, and parents should seek for ways to improve the value it has on their children. It however does not mean banning its viewing which will be going too far given the benefits. When parents abandon their roles as guardians, the effects on children are dire and should not be ignored. Children should be encouraged to watch educative, age-appropriate, and quality materials for positive outcomes. More research should be done to ascertain children's media culture and how best to utilize it for their benefits. Play as an important part in children's education should not be ignored.

Works Cited

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<www.literacytrust.org.uk/reseach/TV>.
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Annotated Biography

Close, Robin. Television and Language Development in the Early Years. A Review of the

Literature. *National Literacy Trust*, (2004): 20-40. Web.

<www.literacytrust.org.uk/reseach/TV>.

The author researched extensively on the effect television had on kids. The conclusion was that although it had some benefits, interaction played a bigger and more efficient role.

Davies, Máire M. *"Dear Bbc": Children, Television Storytelling and the Public Sphere*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Print.

The author views children as consumers and discusses the way television has changed the lives of children. It is based on the research he did on children and television drama. He explored that older children did not just follow what they saw on television, but they had the ability to choose.

Johnson, David. *How Myths About Language Affect Education: What Every Teacher Should*

Know. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008. Print.

The author discusses the various myths that are associated with language and tries to dispel them. The observations are based on the different research done by scholars.

Large, Martin. *Set Free Childhood: Parents' Survival Guide for Coping with Computers and TV*.

Stroud: Hawthorn, 2003. Print.

The author explores the effect of media on children and emphasizes the role of playing while underplaying and the importance of some of the media on children.

Morrow, Robert W. *Sesame Street and the Reform of Children's Television*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005. Print.

The author discusses the role of *Sesame Street* on children and the different arguments that support it. He also informs about production, creation, and the effect it had on both children and adults and the varying views that it elicited.

Pecora, Norma, John P Murray, and Ellen Ann Wartella. Eds. *Children and Television: Fifty Years of Research*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers, 2007: 135-200. Print.

The authors have discussed the issue of kids and television that include views and research done. The researchers vary from scholars to groups.

Van Evra, Judith P. *Television and Child Development*. 3rd ed. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004. Print.

The author summarizes the information that is there currently on the effect of television on children. She focuses on the effect on development and the role played by other media.

Wasko, Janet. *A Companion to Television*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009. Print.

The author discusses all points, from the history of children's television to its production as well as the way it has evolved. The conclusion is that television production for kids was trying to keep the balance between harming and promoting the children.