

MEDIA AND YOUR CHILD

IS MY CHILD TOO WIRED?



'A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS'

FOR CHILDREN BELOW 5 YEARS OLD

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MESSAGE TO PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS



Dear Parents and Caregivers,

This parent information booklet focuses on the effects of media, or more specifically, screen media, on your child. You, as a parent or caregiver, may be interested in the following questions: will watching television help my child learn? Should I stop my child from watching television? What should I do?

Therefore, this booklet aims to provide you with information regarding the negative effects of screen media on your child, recommendations on usage and tips on usage, and an activity for the family. I hope that you will be able to gain a better understanding on this issue and that it would help you build a better learning environment for your child.

Yours truly,

Tan Mei Jing, Jo





BACKGROUND INFORMATION



Media refers to communication outlets used primarily to reach to the public. Common forms of screen media that we are exposed to include television and mobile devices like phones and tablets. As technology is becoming increasingly advanced, many parents are using media as means to entertain their children. A study has found that parents often or mostly allow mobile devices to be used by their child when they are doing household chores or errands, trying to keep the child calm in public and when putting the child to sleep [1].





BACKGROUND INFORMATION



According to a study – **Project iBaby**, it was found that four out of ten households own 1 television and 1 computer while eight out of ten households own more than 2 portable devices [2]. It was also found that 30% of Singapore children aged below 6 months have exposure to screen media and by 1.5 years to 2 years of age, about 90% of Singapore children watch screen media. Furthermore, out of the 90%, a third were exposed to at least 2 hours of screen media daily [3].

 **NUS**
National University of Singapore

Yong Loo Lin Scho.

Project iBaby

ECDA Early Childhood Conference
20th September 2014
The Incredible early years: Supporting Young Children's Development
Singapore Expo Convention & Exhibition Centre





HOW IS SCREEN MEDIA DETRIMENTAL?



Excessive media exposure is detrimental to a child in different areas – health, social and language development. For children under 3 years old, watching television or mobile devices may result in irregular sleeping patterns [4]. Watching screen media can also result in a decrease in the child's attention span due to the fast and continuous changing segments and images of the programme [5]. This can cause negative effects on the child's growth, concentration and cognitive development. Additionally, certain cartoons contain violent scenes which increases the risk of a child's aggressive behaviour during play [6].





HOW IS SCREEN MEDIA DETRIMENTAL?

Although there are programmes which are useful for children's vocabulary acquisition, studies have found that children under the age of 1 year old who are exposed to screen media for more than 2 hours daily are estimated to be 6 times more susceptible to language delays [7]. This is due to the decrease in family interaction time which plays an important role in a child's vocabulary growth as words and sentences used in screen media can be rather repetitive. In addition, studies have shown that parental usage of such devices can also negatively affect a child's development due to a lower rate of parent-child interaction [8]. This is because during a child's initial years of life, daily activities like playing and singing which help to develop and sharpen his motor skills and cognitive abilities may be lost during the usage of screen media.

Furthermore, these negative effects can occur even if the child is not the active user of the devices. Statistics have shown that 50% of children's exposure to television includes background television which they listen and watch due to another family member [9]. Hence, continuous distractions from screen media may interfere with these processes. Furthermore, using screen media to divert the attention of a child can have negative consequences to his social-emotional development where it could impede a child's development of self-regulation skills in terms of his emotions and behaviour [10].





WHAT IS MY ROLE AS A CAREGIVER TO REDUCE SUCH NEGATIVE EFFECTS?

The American Academy of Paediatrics (AAP) have a list of suggested exposure time for children of different ages [11] shown below.



Current Recommendations:



- **18 months and below:** Avoid screen media usage apart from video-chatting

It has been reported by the AAP that there has been no research done to show the advantages of media for children below the age of 2. This is because children below the age of 2 are unable to follow constantly scene-changing or one's dialogue. In addition, children between the age of 1 to 3 are unable to process and internalise information from a video as well as compared to face to face interactions [12].



WHAT IS MY ROLE AS A CAREGIVER TO REDUCE SUCH NEGATIVE EFFECTS?

Current Recommendations:



- 2 to 5 years old: Only 1-2 hour per day consisting of high quality programmes

As media exposure is unavoidable, the AAP recommends parental supervision of screen time for children above 2 years old. Four out of ten Singaporean parents profess that they do not supervise their child's screen viewing all the time and 85.2% are unaware of professional guidelines regarding screen media usage [2].





WHAT IS MY ROLE AS A CAREGIVER TO REDUCE SUCH NEGATIVE EFFECTS?



Parents are recommended to use or watch any applications, websites or programmes before introducing them to their children to gain an insight into their content. Additionally, when using the devices, parents are encouraged to use them with their children and supervise their usage. While doing so, proactive parent-child interaction should also be carried out to aid the child's understanding of what he is watching and help apply it to the world around him. It has been shown that the exposure to language on television or devices can help increase children's passive vocabularies but it is only through interaction with parents – “Oh, what's that? It's an apple!”, which can turn these vocabularies into active vocabularies [13]. In addition, parents should switch off any devices when not in use as they serve as distractors to both parent and the child.

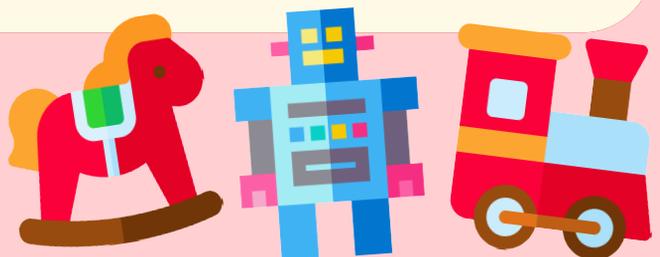




WHAT IS MY ROLE AS A CAREGIVER TO REDUCE SUCH NEGATIVE EFFECTS?

In situations where parents are unable to accompany their children like during the preparation of meals, parents should leave the child alone with toys to encourage independent and free play instead of turning on the television or devices. Through such play, it helps sharpen the child's creativity and problem-solving skills [14]. It is also recommended for parents to set rules regarding the use of media devices such as no watching of shows an hour before bed, during mealtime and playtimes with parents. During these periods, parents can set their phone to the "do not disturb" mode to prevent any form of distraction. This is because children require consistent attention from both parents to form emotional processes. When parents get distracted by their phones, such pattern is broken and may cause the absence of crucial learning [15].

Furthermore, parents should not place a television set or any form of screen media in their children's bedroom. This is to help limit the amount of screen exposure as well. Besides using devices, parents should continue to ensure that a larger proportion of time is still allocated for book reading as it is one of the best way for children to learn. For instance, making bedtime stories a habit before the child goes to bed.





HOW IS SCREEN MEDIA BENEFICIAL IN AIDING MY BILINGUAL CHILD'S LEARNING ENVIRONMENT?



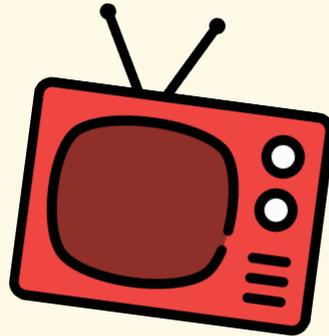
Since studies suggested that exposure to different languages will not confuse multilingual children [16], parents do not have to limit the languages their children are exposed to via media. With technological advancements, media can be used as a learning tool if it is used in moderation with regards to the duration of use and the incorporation of parent-child interaction. The Singapore government has been encouraging the use of technology to make bilingual language learning more interactive for children where there have been various releases of new television programmes and mobile applications. Furthermore, international websites and applications are also made available through the use of the Internet. The AAP has named Sesame Workshop and PBS as their 2 trusted children media [10].



HOW IS SCREEN MEDIA BENEFICIAL IN AIDING MY BILINGUAL CHILD'S LEARNING ENVIRONMENT?

Recommended English television programmes:

- Dora the Explorer
- Blue's Clues
- Arthur
- Sesame Street
- Clifford
- Dragon Tales



These programmes are recommended as they comprise of simple narrative structures and include pauses to allow children to respond [17].





HOW IS SCREEN MEDIA BENEFICIAL IN AIDING MY BILINGUAL CHILD'S LEARNING ENVIRONMENT?

As there have been limited research regarding programmes of other languages besides English, the following programmes and applications have not been tested for their educational values. However, they are included for parents' reference and interests for those who are unaware of the various programmes available for the different Mother Tongues.

Available Chinese television programmes

- Fruity Ice Cream
- Big Ear TuTu
- 十万个为什么

Available Malay television programme:

- Upin Ipin

Available Tamil television programme:

- Pupi



Available Bilingual television programme:

- Junction Tree
 - Mediacorp's Okto channel has released Singapore's first bilingual television series for pre-schoolers on February 27, 2017. They have individual timeslots for English-Chinese, English-Tamil and English-Malay which is suitable for Singaporean children [18].



HOW IS SCREEN MEDIA BENEFICIAL IN AIDING MY BILINGUAL CHILD'S LEARNING ENVIRONMENT?

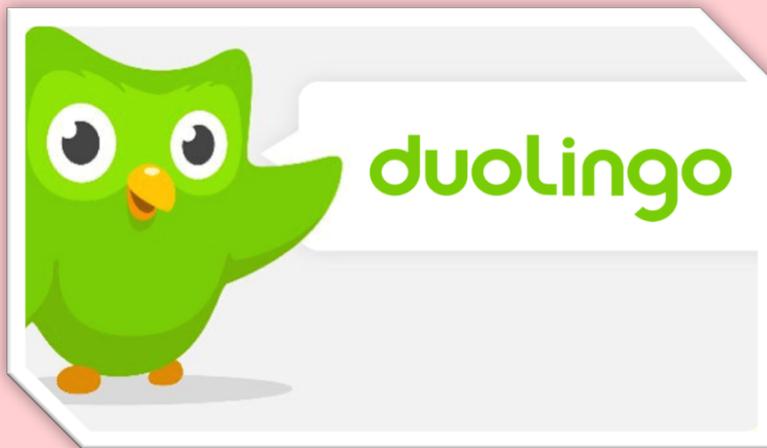
Available language applications:

- Moo-O (English and mother tongues)
- Pintar Kata (Malay)
- Arumbu (Tamil)



Available language website:

- Duolingo
- Memrise



Such applications and websites are beneficial for Singaporean parents who find it difficult to educate their children due to their low proficiency in certain languages. Parents can also make use of E-books to continuously update their children's library. However, these programmes and applications are only beneficial when parents supervise their children's amount of usage and if parent-child interaction is present.



WHAT KIND OF ACTIVITY CAN I DO WITH MY BILINGUAL CHILD USING MY DEVICES?



An activity for bilingual parents in Singapore that can be done with their child is “Word-Matching”. This is an activity inspired by picture cards which can be done both inside and outside of the home premises. Parents can make use of their devices to search for images of unfamiliar items to teach their child new vocabulary. After teaching their child the word, parents can test whether their child has truly understood the concept of the new vocabulary by showing a different image of the same word that was not used and asking, “What is this?” to the child. Parents can carry out this activity in both English and their mother tongue, encouraging their child to reply in the respective languages. This helps to ensure a balanced acquisition of vocabulary between the two languages.





WHAT KIND OF ACTIVITY CAN I DO WITH MY BILINGUAL CHILD USING MY DEVICES?

Parents can then proceed on to the continuation of the activity by playing a game with their child since games can help children learn and retain concepts better [19]. Parents will shout out the names of the new vocabulary in either language to ensure a mixture of both English and their Mother Tongue to continue stimulating the child's language abilities. In the scenario where both parents are unable to speak either language, they can approach any family or friend and use their mobile devices to record the words. This game is done where the parent says or plays the recording of "table" at home, for example, the child is encouraged to go to the location of the "table" at home. Similarly, the parent can play this game outside of home at the playground where "swing" is the targeted word for instance.





WHAT KIND OF ACTIVITY CAN I DO WITH MY BILINGUAL CHILD USING MY DEVICES?

This is an example of the activity.

Parent shows child an image of a toy car.

- Parent: “This is a car!”

Parent shows child an image of a real car.

- Parent: “What is this?”
- Child: “Car!”
- Parent: “Fantastic! You are doing very well! This is a car!”

Outside of home, parent plays the game with child.

- Parent: “Where is our car? Go to our car in the garage!”

Child goes and point to the car.

- Parent: “Well done! You did great! You found our car!”

This game enhances parental interaction with their child and is an easy game which can be continuously updated with new vocabulary the child has learnt. Therefore, this game can serve as a revision to help transform the child’s passive vocabulary which they could initially only understand but are unable to use into active vocabulary.





WHAT KIND OF ACTIVITY CAN I DO WITH MY BILINGUAL CHILD USING MY DEVICES?

However, it is also important for parents to take note of the way they praise their child. Studies have shown that children who received compliments for their efforts were more open to new challenges, better at solving problems and believe in working hard as opposed to children who were praised for their abilities. For instance, “You are doing well!” versus “You are so clever!” [20].





CONCLUSION



It is important to start bilingual education early as frequent usage of both languages from young helps build a stronger cognitive ability in children [21]. The accessibility and portability of screen devices tend to replace important human interactions and other enrichment activities. Many programmes and applications portray themselves as “educational”, which may explain why parents are accepting an increase in their children’s screen time [22]. Singaporean parents need to be aware of the negative effects of screen media on their child’s language development in order to avoid them. Parents can then learn to use media wisely to help their children in their bilingual language development.



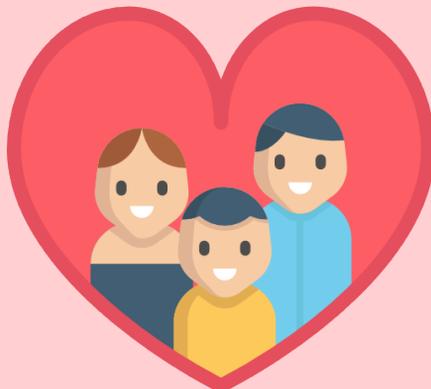


CONCLUSION



It is not about the qualities possessed by various programmes or applications, but about how parents use them. The incorporation of media into a child's language learning, however, should not result in parents forgoing their responsibilities in educating their children. Parents should also take note that there is a limit to how much a child can learn through the use of media as compared to learning through exploration, interaction and unstructured playtime. After gaining an insight on this topic, parents can proceed to the references if they are interested in particular findings found in this booklet to help them understand better.

For parents who are hoping to use media as a learning tool for their children with special needs, they can refer to my fellow colleague, Ma Xinyi's booklet. Additionally, for teachers who are looking to incorporate media as a pedagogical tool, please refer to my other colleague, Jamie Lai Huiying's booklet.





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