

# Digital literacy for children: An overview

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## ABSTRACT

Digital technologies have become a part of everyday life, taking center stage. It has dominated people's lives and changed the way they live life. The task of protecting and raising awareness of children from the negative effects of the digital age, which especially affects the psychological, physical, social and cognitive development of children, is again on the family, school and society. For this reason, this study aims to define the concept of digital literacy for today's children by presenting a different perspective and inspiring new research to be conducted. In the study, the literature review model, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. Articles, theses, dissertations, professional publications, research and research reports on the subject were examined. In the findings section of the study, the importance of the child and the family raising him/her, the digital age and its impact on education, the importance of digital literacy in education, and the advantages and disadvantages of digital literacy are discussed. In conclusion, in order to shape the future of societies with solid foundations, it is very important to teach children digital literacy skills, which also means understanding technology and using it appropriately, in the light of customs and traditions.

**Keywords:** Digital literacy, digital age, child raising, family, education.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the current age, with the rapid advancement of technological developments, every child growing up in a world where the variety of technological products has increased and many opportunities of the online world have emerged is exposed to establishing a relationship with technology. Education starts in the family and continues at school.

Observing how children learn, how they think, their emotional reactions, their interactions with their surroundings, their peer relationships, their emotions, their temperaments and their developing personalities enables us to know and understand children. At this point, for the development of a child, the family and the teacher should exhibit consistent behaviours that support each other.

Societies consisting of well-educated individuals have strong and solid bonds. Families who want to guide their children should acquire digital literacy skills, follow new technologies, and be aware of the risks their children may experience (Karakuş Yılmaz, 2020).

In order to understand the importance of digital literacy for children, it should be known that we live in a world where about half of the population, including 70 per cent of individuals between the ages of 5 and 24, are online (International Telecommunication Union [ITU], 2018).

For this reason, it is very important to teach children digital literacy skills, which also means understanding technology and using it appropriately, in order to shape the future of societies robustly.

While technological changes and developments continue rapidly, it is important to educate and support children about digital literacy from an early age and to be a role model for children in order for them to be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of the digital world with its ever-changing nature, to be protected from its negative effects, to use digital products correctly in accordance with their purpose, and to learn the methods of being in digital environments.

## METHOD

The aim of this study is to define the concept of digital literacy for children today. Literature review model, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the study. When conducting qualitative research, it is important to apply the strategies developed in accordance with the nature of the research step by step. Qualitative research methods allow the observations made, documents and visuals examined to be analysed

and the emerging situations to be evaluated from different perspectives (Maxwell, 2022).

Literature review reveals the importance of the research in the field and enables the results to be compared with previous findings (Creswell and Creswell, 2021). According to Demirci (2014), the issues that researchers should follow in literature review studies are planning, searching and finding sources, examining the sources and writing the literature.

In this study, articles, theses, dissertations, professional publications, research and research reports related to the topic addressed in line with the purpose of the research were analysed. The study, which aims to inspire new research by providing a broad perspective on the current situation of a scientific subject, was carried out by paying attention to the specified stages.

## FINDINGS

In this part of the study, which aims to define digital literacy for children, the importance of the child and the family raising him/her, the digital age and the impact of the digital age on education, the importance of digital literacy in education, and the advantages and disadvantages of digital literacy are emphasised.

### Child and family

The most important role in the education of the child belongs to the family. The family is an institution where two people who have grown up in different family cultures take responsibility for a common life together. A child's life begins when the prospective mother chooses the prospective father and the prospective father chooses the prospective mother. In other words, even before a child is formed in the womb, the personality, beliefs, attitude towards events, style and profession of the parents affect the child's thinking. On the other hand, after the child is born, the way the family raises the child forms the basis of the child's character.

Family is the essence and foundation of a society. Having a child is a great cause of happiness for the mother and father. Families consisting of individuals who show love, trust and sufficient attention; who share the same beliefs, thoughts and feelings; who are aware of their responsibilities and fulfil their responsibilities are peaceful and happy. The family is the source of love and compassion for the child (Aydin, 2021).

People transfer their basic beliefs and values to new generations through the family. The most important duty of the family, which is the smallest building block of society, is to raise their children in the best way. The first learning of the child takes place through imitation and listening. The environment, behaviour, attitude, problem-solving styles of the family and the quality of the words used in the family are role models for the child in the process of developing a positive personality.

It is important to provide a peaceful and happy family environment in order to raise children with good physical and mental health. The child learns all the behaviours

that he/she will exhibit to himself/herself, living and non-living beings from an early age. If the child can grow up by being valued in his/her environment from an early age, he/she has an advantage in his/her future initiatives and in discovering and revealing his/her potential.

Behaviours that will guide the child to the good, the beautiful and the right should be done. Following the development of the child, understanding him/her correctly and supporting his/her development creates opportunities for children to be harmonious and successful in the future. In order to increase the success of children, it is necessary to strengthen their souls while strengthening their mental development.

Nurturing children's souls does not mean buying them everything they want or offering them the life that family members cannot live. It is important to teach the child that he/she should communicate with kind people and behave kindly, to instil in him/her the awareness that he/she should contribute to the society in which he/she lives, to make him/her realise that there are invisible bonds between all living and non-living beings and their importance in his/her life, to make him/her feel the value of maintaining traditions, customs and to make him/her feel how important his/her role is for social development.

In order to support the spiritual development of children, they should be made to feel that they did not come to this world in vain, and they should be enabled to create a life purpose that is beneficial to themselves and society in line with their potential. This increases their self-confidence and enables them to live in accordance with the requirements of the age they are in without losing their own essence.

### Digital age

Interacting with digital devices from an early age, using the internet, opening social media accounts, and using mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets have become quite common. It is seen that individuals who meet with technology in later periods of their lives have problems adapting to technological developments, while individuals who grow up with technological products from an early age adapt to technology quickly (Karakuş Yılmaz, 2020).

Being aware of the benefits of digital technological products as well as the dangers they contain is necessary for the development of children's digital literacy skills. Families who are introduced to technology at an advanced age focus on the benefits of digital technological products rather than the risks and are not aware of the time their children spend with digital technological products and online (Kumpulainen and Gillen, 2019).

It is seen that there are role models in social media environments that will cause problems with children's personality, body perception and mental health. These situations affect children's academic success by revealing introversion, lack of self-confidence, lack of self-esteem, lack of self-respect and feelings of inadequacy, and cause negative effects such as anger, violence and stress in communication (Villani, 2001).

Children who spend too much time on the Internet and use the media in an unconscious and uncontrolled way face various difficulties and risks such as lynching, cyberbullying, showing false information as true, being directed to criminal and violent activities, and not feeling belonging to the society (Gigli, 2004).

In the research on the subject, it is emphasised that families and educational institutions must provide children with the necessary skills and follow up with children in order for children to use digital technologies purposefully and safely and to protect them from these dangers by recognising the dangers in the online environment (Livingstone, 2007; Mustafaoğlu, Zirek, Yasacı and Özdingler, 2018; Muslu and Bolışık, 2009; Kardeş, 2020).

### Digital literacy

The widespread use of the Internet, easy access to digital tools and the lack of conscious use of digital tools in accordance with their purpose have led to the formation of insecure digital environments and problems in the digital age we are in. It is thought that the elimination of the problems experienced is possible with an increase in the level of digital literacy, which is defined as "the ability to survive in the digital age" by Eshet-Alkalai, 2004. There are many definitions of knowing how to use digital technology safely and responsibly.

Digital literacy means accessing digital resources and using these resources correctly (Karabacak and Sezgin, 2019). It also refers to the use of digital tools to produce information, access the right information, and use and share information in accordance with its purpose. This situation includes the ability of individuals to use information and communication technologies to solve the problems they face by learning information and communication technologies, to support personal development, and to be competent in terms of security, legal and ethical in the use of technology (Özerbaş and Kuralbayeva, 2018).

Pala and Başbüyük (2020) defined digital literacy as the ability to access new information using digital tools, to use them in problem-solving, to process the information obtained, and to use digital technologies effectively and safely.

In light of the definitions of digital literacy skills; according to Alexander, Adams Becker and Cummins (2016), digital literacy is an umbrella term that should include many skills together. These skills are expressed as the skills of using digital products or software, consuming and producing digital content, and providing meaningful participation in digital communities.

Being aware of digital environments is vital for the development of digital literacy skills in education and training processes and for families to have digital literacy skills (Doğan, 2020). Because digital literacy skills develop children's research, problem-solving, collaborative learning, interaction and critical thinking skills (Gillen, Arnott, Marsh, Bus, Castro, Dardanou and Holloway, 2018).

According to UNICEF (2017), there is no official

definition of digital literacy as research continues globally. In the 2018 Policy Guidance on Children and Digital Connectivity, digitally literate children are defined as: 1. access and operate digital environments safely and effectively; 2. evaluate information critically; 3. communicate safely, responsibly and effectively through digital technology; and 4. create digital content.

According to UNESCO (2018), digital literacy is the ability to securely access, manage, understand, integrate, communicate, evaluate and create information through digital technologies. The purpose of all these skills is employment, decent work and entrepreneurship.

Due to the widespread use of the Internet, the acceleration of technological change and the findings on the situation of children exposed to communication technologies in digital environments, online access, risks and opportunities have gained importance.

In the age we are in, all children in the world do not have the same opportunities. International projects that examine social, cultural, psychological and digital literacy practices are being carried out to reveal how digital inequalities affect children, to identify situations that may harm children, to obtain information on how they can be protected, and to access data on the impact of digital marginalisation on children. For example, Global Kids Online is an international research project that aims to build and maintain a robust cross-country evidence base on children's internet use by creating a global network of researchers and experts.

With the widespread use of digital media tools and the internet in the digital age, radical changes are taking place in daily life. In today's world, digital technologies are becoming indispensable in the lives of children and young people.

While digital technologies create new learning opportunities for children, they can also bring new risks to child development every day. For this reason, while parents and teachers want to benefit from digital opportunities by taking into account the cognitive, social and emotional development of their children, they are also concerned about protecting them from the risks brought by digital technologies (Livingstone et al., 2017).

Families and teachers need to be supported jointly to ensure that children can both benefit from technological opportunities and avoid risks (Kumpulainen and Gillen, 2017). Therefore, in the face of digitalization, the task of policymakers is to support teachers, children and families as well as to expand access to technological tools in education (Livingstone, 2020).

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Children are increasingly living their lives in digital environments. In a globalised world, digital literacy for children refers to the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are appropriate for their age, the traditions and customs of the society they live in, and their safe and strong development (Nascimbeni and Vosloo, 2019). In the digital world of an age where internet use is rapidly expanding, it is stated that it is important for children to be digitally literate in studies (Council of Europe [CoE],

2018, UNICEF, 2017, UNESCO, 2017) where large-scale global data on digital literacy are collected.

As a result of the literature review conducted in the research, in addition to the developments in the field of digital technology, the issue of protection from the negativities emerging in digital environments draws attention. While supporting children's interaction with digital technological products, ensuring their digital literacy, peace and happiness requires more care, regulations and filling the gaps in our education system. Similarly, Muslu and Bolışık (2009) stated in their study that children should be monitored and informed about internet use.

The basic needs of children, who are individuals who have not yet reached maturity and maturity in physical, mental and social aspects, are love, trust and sufficient attention (Yavuzer, 2012). For this reason, all children in the world, who need to be raised carefully with the awareness of trust as adults of the future, exhibit almost the same characteristics. To love children is not to kiss and caress them constantly, to shower them with beautiful clothes and gifts, to fulfil their every wish, but to make them feel that they are valuable.

Since children are individuals who are curious about innocent innovations, they are open to the harmful effects of digital environments. It is one of the duties of families and educators to limit the child's use of technology, to control the content he/she is exposed to, to teach him/her that he/she should ask for help from adults in situations that may cause cyberbullying or make him/her feel uncomfortable.

As a result, within the scope of the findings obtained, researchers can be recommended to conduct studies on the factors affecting children's learning processes in the digital age and the role of the family and teacher in the effect of digital literacy on different age groups. The responsibilities of the digital age can be fulfilled by ensuring the cooperation of family, teacher and child.

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