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Research Insights
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PARENTAL CONTROL AND USE OF THE INTERNET AMONG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

Prof. Dr. Marina Matejević
University of Niš (Serbia)

Assist. Prof. Nedeljko Milanović
University of Kragujevac (Serbia)

Abstract. The aim of this article is to determine the connection between parental control and the use of the Internet by students in the younger grades of elementary school. Descriptive statistics and methods of statistical inference were used in the research. The research subjects were third and fourth grade elementary school students (N=212). The findings show that parents control boys significantly more online than girls. The calculated Pearson correlation coefficient between behavioral control and Internet use control shows that there is a positive correlation (r=0.500) that is statistically significant (r<0.05), while there is no statistically significant correlation between psychological control and Internet use control. The results of our research indicate the importance of parental behavioral control and the need for the school to provide adequate support to parents as part of a program for parents to adequately implement parental control, so that parents understand what problems arise from permissive upbringing and inadequate guidance of children's development.

Keywords: parental control; behavioral control; psychological control; internet use

Introduction

The Internet gathers the attention of the youngest with its availability, as well as content, and accordingly, parents have a key role in family education, which is surrounded by the circumstances of the virtual society. In modern times, the Internet represents a spacious playground for children (Kabakci, Odabasi & Coklar 2008), where the former established patterns of children's play are largely replaced by modern Internet applications and networks, and more intense parental control is necessary. Fulfilling the requirements of the educational function, modern parents must understand and apply, in an adequate and expedient manner, the concept of controlling children. The authors believe that the control of children by their parents can affect children, as well as their ability to respond to various problems and situations at a later age, i.e. when they grow up (Nie, Hu & Qiu 2022).

For the understanding of the concept of parental control, the research of Schaefer (Schaefer 1965) is significant, which identified two mutually independent dimensions of upbringing using a factorial procedure: the affective dimension and the dimension of control. The affective dimension represents the emotional relationship of the parents towards the child and is delimited by the genders "warm" and "cold" or rejecting and accepting upbringing. The second educational dimension, the dimension of control, shows the permitted psychological and physical freedom and independence of the child. It is bounded by the poles of "permissive" and "restrictive" upbringing or autonomy and control. Based on the dimensions defined by Schaefer, more attention was directed towards the research of parents' educational style, which refers to relatively consistent ways of behavior of parents, which establish overall relationships with children (Matejević 2007). After several decades, Barber (Barber 1996) in his research updated and elaborated the neglected concept of parental control and pointed out the importance of distinguishing between behavioral and psychological control for developmental outcomes. Unlike psychological control that burdens development and hinders individuality and the development of autonomy and has a negative impact on developmental outcomes (Barber & Harmon 2002; Pérez, Huerta, Rubio & Fernández 2021), behavioral control has positive effects for children's development, because children receive clear guidelines for appropriate behavior, and parents attempt to control or manage children's behavior (Pomerantz & Wang 2009). Certainly, it is necessary to nurture individuality in children, direct and monitor their desires, but prepare them for life and the challenges that modern times present. Ways of exercising control by parents are very complex and sensitive procedures that must be pedagogically shaped and adapted to the social situation and characteristics of the child and require unique parental involvement in the spectrum of family education. As the parental role is of crucial importance in the proper formation of the child's personality, children's stay on the Internet requires parental commitment and control (Kuzmanović, Pavlović, Popadić & Milošević 2019; Lagator, Šincek & Duvnjak 2018; Livingstone & Helsper 2008; Zuković & Slijepčević 2015). The authors agree that parents must be (self)aware of the dangers and risks that an individual's incompetent behavior on the Internet can lead to, while a responsible, interested and mature parent focuses on children's actions in the Internet world, because unsupervised activities can be the product of many problems in today's social frameworks subject to accelerated changes. Many authors believe that there are various dangers that can occur on the Internet and in general with the use of modern technology and some of them are electronic violence (Elsaesser, Russell, Ohannessian & Patton 2017; Li 2006; Strohmeier & Gradinger 2022), Internet addiction (King, Delfabbro, Griffiths & Gradisar 2011; Lukić, Ranković & Ranković 2017), the influence of video games with violent content and themes on behavior (Jevtić & Savić 2013). In accordance with the views and opinions of researchers, we can agree that the control of students by workers in the aspect of the use of technology and the Internet, which

is often incongruent in the sphere of individual characteristics and placed topics, is a preventive context and the basis of valid use. Therefore, considering all of the above, the focus of this paper will be on parental control and Internet use among younger elementary school students.

Methodological research

The findings of relevant research indicate that children start using the Internet at an ever younger age, without proper parental insight into their activities. Uncontrolled use of the Internet carries with it numerous potential risks of children's exposure to various inappropriate content, misuse and the development of addiction, which adversely affects the mental and physical health of children. Given that the examples and models that students of the younger grades of elementary school uncritically find in the various contents that the Internet offers have a significant influence on the formation of personality, we considered that adequate parental control in this period is very important, in order to find more adequate models for identification, and how the formation of certain habits of spending free time would be a function of acceptable development outcomes. That's why the subject of our research is parental control and internet use among students in the younger grades of elementary school. The aim of this paper is to determine the connection between parental control and Internet use among students in the younger grades of elementary school.

212 third and fourth grade elementary school students from Jagodina and Ćuprija participated in the research. 115 (54.2%) female students and 97 (45.8%) male students participated. As mentioned, 101 (47.6%) third-grade elementary school students and 111 (52.4%) fourth-grade elementary school students participated. According to school achievements, the students are divided into three groups: 23 (10.8%) students have good school performance, 80 (37.7%) very good and 109 (51.5%) students have excellent school performance.

Descriptive statistics and statistical inference methods were used in this research. How the researched topic is current, based on theoretical approaches, results, instruments of relevant and related research in this area (e.g. Barber, Olsen & Shagle 1994; Barber 1996; Barber & Harmon 2002; Kuzmanović et al. 2019 according to the questionnaire developed by international team of Children on the Internet; Stevanović et al. 2014) some questions/items we selected, some adapted, while some questions/items we formed for the survey questionnaire that was the instrument used for this empirical research. With scales, students had the opportunity to circle the appropriate response modality on a five-point Likert-type rating scale. Since the sample of the research consists of students of younger grades of elementary school, with the consent and permission of the parents, we started collecting data. Therefore, relying on close psychological and pedagogical works and research on this topic, as well as different settings and approaches of the authors, we tried to make the wording of the questions in the instruments clear and concrete. In the introductory part, instructions were given

to the students, which were written and presented in a simple style, comprehensible to students of that age, and each question had detailed instructions for filling it out. Also, in the introductory part, it was emphasized that the research is anonymous, and we also informed the parents about this. When filling out the instruments, the teachers who were present during the filling out of the instruments, provided help and assisted in the data collection process, were of great help. The reliability of the instrument expressed by the Cronbach alpha coefficient for the first instrument is 0.615, while for the second instrument it is 0.701. Statistical data processing was done in the IBM SPSS Statistics program. Frequencies, percentages, arithmetic mean, standard deviation, one-factor ANOVA, t-test and Pearson's correlation coefficient are the applied statistical parameters.

Results and discussion

In this part of the article, we will present the results of the empirical research that concerned parental control and Internet use among students in the younger grades of elementary school. The results will be tabulated.

The first research task was to examine whether and how often students use the Internet. All respondents who participated in the research answered yes to the question of whether they use the Internet. So, there were no negative answers. Based on the data on the time spent on the Internet, all the surveyed students are on the Internet every day and spend more and more time, so that 44 (20.8%) students spend between two and three hours on the Internet, between four and five hours on 67 (31.6%) students spend time on the Internet, and as many as 101 (47.6%) students spend more than five hours on the Internet. The results of a very close and comprehensive research show that "most children (over 50%) spend a minimum of three hours a day on the Internet on weekdays, and four hours a day on weekends" (Kuzmanović et al. 2019, p. 20). Worrying data points to excessive use of the Internet and media, which can lead to addiction. These data require greater parental involvement and animating children with other, more diverse content.

Numerous researches in this area mainly focus on the content that children deal with in this world. The Internet offers a variety of content, so we tried to examine the purposes for which students use the Internet. The lowest average value is present in the item that students use the Internet to search for content for school, explaining lessons that are not clear to them and clarifying unknown terms (M=2.34), as well as in the item that students use the Internet to read online books, reading materials for school and online magazines (M=2.15), while a high average value is present for all items that describe the spontaneous use of the Internet by students of younger grades in the context of relaxation, relaxation, correspondence, watching videos, uploading photos and clips to current networks that they use and another. The research results indicate that „the Internet is primarily used for entertainment and communication with other people" (Kuzmanović et al. 2019, p. 22).

The author (Šmakić 2016) points out that young people represent the social group that most often uses digital media (social networks, playing games). Also, research results show that the largest number of young people use their free time to use social networks (Hodžić & Sokol 2019), while the findings of a related research show that children start using the Internet early (Stevanović et al. 2014). Therefore, in today's time, the contents of the Internet are very close and dominant in the lives of children and young people, and for these reasons we wanted to examine how the parents of students most often feel about their use of the Internet.

Table 1. How parents most often feel about their children's use of the Internet

	Min	Max	M	SD
Because of my use of the Internet, I think my parents feel scared.	1	5	4,19	0,85
Because of my use of the Internet, I think my parents feel worried.	1	5	4,14	0,97
Because of my use of the Internet, I think that my parents feel comfortable and satisfied.	1	5	2,94	1,28

Based on the analysis of the questions related to parents' feelings about the use of the Internet, we conclude that children generally agree with the statements that their parents feel scared (M=4.19) and worried (M=4.14) about their use of the Internet, and they least agree with the statement that their parents feel comfortable and satisfied because of their use of the Internet (M=2.94). Considering the numerous risks that exist in the virtual world, such parental feelings are justified. We looked at this question through the determination of statistically significant differences between parents' feelings about students' use of the Internet and sociodemographic characteristics.

Table 2. Differences between parents' feelings about students' Internet use in relation to gender

	t	df	p
Because of my use of the Internet, I think my parents feel scared.	-3.198	210	.002
Because of my use of the Internet, I think my parents feel worried.	-1.822	210	.070
Because of my use of the Internet, I think that my parents feel comfortable and satisfied.	-.220	210	.826

We found that there is a statistically significant difference in the claim *that because of my use of the Internet I think that my children feel scared* between girls and boys. Through descriptive analysis, it was observed that significantly more girls think that their parents feel scared because of their use of the Internet. Also, we found that there is no statistically significant difference in the answers to the statements related to the most common feelings of parents due to children's use of the Internet in relation to the class the children attend. There is no statistically significant difference in responses for statements related to parental feelings due to students' use of the Internet in relation to school success.

Very closely related research concerning parental supervision and student behavior on the Internet indicates the need to consider psychological and behavioral control in this context (Lagator et al. 2018). Accordingly, considering the aspect of parental control of students on the Internet, we wanted to determine the presence of psychological and behavioral control from the student's perspective. On a Likert-type scale, students expressed their degree of agreement with items related to psychological control and behavioral control. Based on the results related to questions related to psychological control by parents, children most agree with the statement that parents try to change what the child thinks about certain things (M=3.00), while students least agree with the statement that parents they constantly try to change them (M=1.71) and for parents to change the topic whenever the children have something to say (M=1.75). The analyzed results show that boys generally think that: parents are trying to change their minds about some things; that parents often interrupt them; that parents stop talking to them when they disappoint them; that parents cite past mistakes when criticizing them; that parents are constantly trying to change them. Also, the results show that fourth graders perceive their parents to change the subject whenever they have something to say much more than third graders do. Therefore, we can conclude that children do not perceive that their parents exert psychological control expressed through the items in the instrument.

Based on the results of the analysis related to behavioral parental control, we conclude that the students agreed with all the statements to a large extent, but still, they expressed the most agreement in relation to the statements that their parents know what grades they have at school (M=4.42), that they ask their parents for permission to go out (M=4.36) and that their parents know who they hang out with (M=4.33). In relation to all the statements from the aspect of behavioral control, we came to the conclusion that girls agree significantly more in relation to: asking their parents for permission to go out; that parents know who their friends are; that parents know how they spend their pocket money; that parents know how they spend their free time; that parents know how much and how much time they spend preparing for school and that parents know what grades they have in school. Also, through descriptive analysis, it was observed that very good and excellent students

agree to a significantly greater extent with the statements: that they ask their parents for permission to go out; that parents know who their friends are and that parents know how they spend their free time, than students with good school results. Within the framework of behavioral control, with the following task we tried to determine whether there are statistically significant differences between parental control and gender, the class they attend and the school success of students. It was shown that there is a statistically significant difference between the frequency of parental control and the gender of the children. The results show that in the aspect of behavioral control, parents control boys more often than girls ($t=11.113$; $df=210$; $p=0.000$). There are no statistically significant differences between the frequency of control and the class the children attend ($t=0.143$; $df=210$; $p=0.886$). Also, it was calculated that there are no statistically significant differences between the frequency of parental control and the school success of children ($F=2.099$; $p=0.125$). Out of the total number of respondents, 54 (25.5%) students state that their parents control them on the Internet every day; 89 (42%) students state that their parents control occasionally; 10 (4.7%) students state that their parents control them only when they notice a behavior problem or a situation occurs that requires more frequent control of the children; 59 (27.8%) students state that their parents control them on the Internet very rarely. Similar findings were also reached by research (Milanović 2021), which shows that about half of the surveyed senior elementary school students self-assess that their parents do not deal with the ways in which they use the Internet. In order to comprehensively approach the consideration of behavioral control in the aspect of controlling students on the Internet, a research task was formulated with which we wanted to examine how parents control students on the Internet.

Table 3. Ways in which parents control students on the Internet

	Min	Max	M	SD
Parents check the pages, portals and other websites I visit and use.	1	5	2.90	0.99
Parents check my correspondence and messages on the Internet.	1	5	2.73	1.08
Parents very often watch and check all my activities on the social networks I use.	1	5	2.95	0.96
My parents limit how much time I can use the Internet during the day (during the school year), during weekends and holidays.	1	5	3.23	1.03

My parents restrict my use of the Internet and the use of phones, tablets and computers during the day (during the school year), weekends and holidays	1	5	3.25	1.06

Based on the results, the children expressed the most agreement in relation to the statements that their parents limit their use of the Internet and the use of phones, tablets and computers during the day (during the school year), during weekends and holidays (M=3.25) and that their parents limit how much time they can use the Internet during the day (during the school year), during weekends and holidays (M=3.23). The obtained research results (Brindova et al. 2014) show that more than half of parents rarely or never use rules regarding the length of television viewing or the time spent on the computer. The results of the research show that as many as 90.2% of fourth-grade elementary school students respect and adhere to parental rules regarding the use of the Internet, including restrictions on use by parents (Lagator et al. 2018). With the next task, we wanted to determine whether there is a correlation between behavioral control and control of Internet use.

Table 4. Correlation of behavioral control and Internet use control

		Behavioral control	**Internet use control**
Behavioral control	r	1	.500**
	p		.000
	N	212	212
Internet use control	r	.500**	1
	p	.000	
	N	212	212

The presented results (Table 4) show that there is a positive correlation (r=0.500) which is statistically significant (r<0.05). After showing the correlation between behavioral control and Internet use control, we tried to determine if there is a correlation between psychological control and Internet use control.

Table 5. Correlation of psychological control and Internet use control

		Psychological control	Internet use control
Psychological control	r	1	-.095
	P		.70
	N	212	212
Internet use control	r	-.095	1
	p	.170	
	N	212	212

The results show that there is no statistically significant correlation between psychological control and Internet use control (Table 5). Determining whether there is a correlation between psychological and behavioral control and the way students use the Internet was the next research task.

Table 6. Correlation between psychological control and the way students use the Internet

		Psychological control	The way students use the Internet
Психолошка контрола	r	1	-.021
	p		.756
	N	212	212
The way students use the Internet	r	-.021	1
	p	.756	
	N	212	212

Based on the results presented in Table 6, we observe that there are no statistically significant correlations.

Table 7. Correlation between behavioral control and the way students use the Internet

		Behavioral control	The way students use the Internet
Behavioral control	r	1	.306**
	p		.000
	N	212	212
The way students use the Internet	r	.306**	1
	p	.000	
	N	212	212

From the results presented in Table 7, we can see that there is a positive correlation ($r=0.306$) that is statistically significant ($r<0.05$) between behavioral

control and the way students use the Internet. With the last task, we wanted to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the way parents control students on the Internet and the sociodemographic characteristics of students.

Table 8. Differences between the way parents control their children on the Internet in relation to gender

	t	df	p
Parents check the pages, portals and other websites I visit and use.	8.348	210	0.000
Parents check my correspondence and messages on the Internet.	10.426	210	0.000
Parents very often watch and check all my activities on the social networks I use.	8.845	210	0.000
My parents limit how much time I can use the Internet during the day (during the school year), during weekends and holidays.	5.955	210	0.000
My parents restrict my use of the Internet and the use of phones, tablets and computers during the day (during the school year), weekends and holidays.	5.683	210	0.000

We found that in the statements related to the ways in which parents control students on the Internet in relation to the gender of the children, there is a statistically significant difference for all statements. We came to the conclusions that parents control boys significantly more on the Internet, while girls agree significantly more with the statements that: parents check the pages, portals and other websites that I visit and use; parents check correspondence and messages on the Internet; parents check their activities on social networks; their parents limit the time they spend on the Internet during the day, weekends and holidays; their parents limit their use of the Internet, as well as phones, tablets and computers during the day, weekends and holidays. „When it comes to controlling the time spent at the computer, a higher percentage of boys state that their parents control them" (Zotović, Beara & Erdeš Kavečan 2017, p. 472), while „with phones, the situation is reversed and a higher percentage of girls estimate that experiences parental control" (Zotović et al. 2017, p. 472). Research findings show that there are no differences between the perception of boys and girls regarding parental control (Lagator et al. 2018). We found that there is no statistically significant difference in the answers to the statements of the way in which parents exercise control in relation to the class the students attend. We found that for statements related to the ways in which parents control students on the Internet, there is no statistically significant difference in the answers in relation to the success of students in school.

Conclusion and implications

In today's time, numerous risks from the everyday physical environment are transferred to the virtual world, the world of the Internet, where children can encounter various negative and risky aspects (Kovačević-Lepojević & Žunić-Pavlović 2011). The obtained results of the research show that the Internet is very often represented in the daily life of students of younger grades of elementary school, with worrying findings showing that as many as 47.6% of students spend more than five hours a day on the Internet, while 31.6% of students spend between four and five o'clock. Such findings require a serious approach and parental commitment in looking at this kind of student behavior, the outcome of which can be accompanied by numerous negative effects. When it comes to parental control, the results of our research show that parents control boys on the Internet significantly more than girls. Considering children's experience of the presence of psychological and behavioral control, the analysis of the results of our research shows that the presence of psychological control by parents is very low, while students estimate that behavioral control by parents is more common. The correlation between behavioral control and Internet use control shows that there is a positive and strong correlation that is statistically significant, while there is no statistically significant correlation between psychological control and Internet use control. Parents who implement behavioral control encourage self-control in children and do not leave opportunities for uncontrolled behaviors that can lead to various risky and maladaptive forms and abuses. Through descriptive analysis, it was observed that significantly more girls believe and estimate that their parents feel scared because of the use of the Internet, while research (Žiropađa 2007) testifies to the fact that even half of parents have a negative attitude towards children's computer use. The topicality of this problem indicates the necessity of support that the school and the wider social community should provide to parents in implementing adequate forms of control within family education.

As a limitation, we can mention the selection of a sample of respondents that included only third- and fourth-grade students, while further research could also include first- and second-grade elementary school students, because the age limits of children in the context of using the Internet today are getting lower and this network is increasingly it is more often present among younger children, as indicated by numerous authors in the discussion of this contemporary topic. Also, we can mention the lower reliability of the instrument with which we examined the use of the Internet by students. This research represents an attempt to actualize research on the concept of parental control in the context of behavioral and psychological control, which seems not to have received enough attention in pedagogical research, and understanding their role is very important for the process of education and the outcomes of children's development. Action research can serve as an idea in the process of encouraging and improving parental

control, cooperative relations between family and school through the inclusion of children in the implementation of joint activities, as well as directing parents through programs that would focus on familiarizing parents with the importance of behavioral control in children's development and its pedagogical application in family education, understanding and overcoming the permissive actions of parents that are very noticeable and present today. Certainly, the discussed topic provides a range of possibilities for future research that will enrich the aspect of family education and the establishment of valid and democratic relations between parents and children in the time of the progression of modern technology and the strong influence of the Internet.

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✉ **Prof. Dr. Marina Matejević**
ORCID iD: 0000-0003-0069-7939
Faculty of Philosophy
University of Niš
Niš, Serbia
E-mail: marina.matejevic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

✉ **Mr. Nedeljko Milanović, Assist. Prof.**
ORCID iD: 0000-0002-4563-3544
Faculty of Education in Jagodina
University of Kragujevac
Kragujevac, Serbia
E-mail: nedeljko@pefja.kg.ac.rs