

# Digital Games in Youth Development: Perspectives of Parents and Adolescents (15–19 Years)

Divecha, R. <sup>1</sup>, Siddiqui, A. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, College of Home Science, Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai

<sup>2</sup> Post Graduate Research Scholar, College of Home Science, Nirmala Niketan, Mumbai

**Abstract:** This study investigated the perception of digital games among parents and youth aged 15–19 years, with a particular emphasis on their potential as educational tools. With digital gaming becoming increasingly prevalent among adolescents, this research aimed at understanding the awareness, attitudes, and concerns held by both youth and their parents regarding the influence of digital games on learning, behavior, and daily life. Utilizing self-constructed tools comprising both close-ended and open-ended questions, the study engaged 43 parents and an equal number of youth participants. The data collection instruments explored preferences in game genres, daily usage, cognitive and behavioural effects, and both the positive and negative impacts of gaming. While youth favoured action-oriented games for their entertainment and challenge, many also acknowledged benefits such as improved problem-solving, decision-making, and strategic thinking. At the same time, they recognized drawbacks such as eye strain, poor time management, emotional disturbances, and decreased physical activity. Parents expressed a dual perception: they acknowledged the developmental benefits of certain games—particularly those that foster critical thinking—but were also concerned about aggression, social isolation, and academic distraction. A significant portion of parents reported difficulty in consistently monitoring or limiting screen time, especially given the immersive nature of digital games and the busy schedules of modern family life. The research concludes that while digital games have notable educational potential, this is best realized when both parents and youth adopt balanced and informed approaches. Guidelines developed as part of this study advocate for shared decision-making, self-monitoring by youth, content-aware supervision by parents, and integration of alternative recreational activities. The findings emphasize the need for increased digital literacy and proactive parental involvement to ensure that digital games are used constructively.

**Index Terms/ Key words:** *Digital Games, Youth Development, Parent and Adolescent Perspectives, Educational Potential of Digital Games, Youth Autonomy vs. Parental Regulation*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Digital games have become an integral part of modern adolescence, occupying a significant portion of leisure time and contributing to both entertainment and learning experiences. As the digital landscape evolves, so does the discourse surrounding the impact of digital games on young users. Parents and educators often question whether these games are mere distractions or if they hold untapped educational potential.

This research investigates the perceptions of parents and youth (aged 15–19 years) concerning digital games, focusing on their educational potential, associated benefits, and possible drawbacks. The study highlights not only generational differences in gaming perception but also seeks to identify strategies to optimize digital gaming for educational growth.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The growing interest in digital games as a medium of entertainment and education has spurred a substantial body of research. Scholars have examined digital games from multiple perspectives, including their cognitive, emotional, and social effects on youth. With the proliferation of smartphones and gaming devices, the accessibility and variety of digital games have influenced perceptions among both youth and parents.

**Digital Games and Cognitive Development**  
Digital games have been identified as potential tools to enhance cognitive skills. Studies suggest that digital games can support skills like problem-solving, spatial navigation, and hand-eye coordination [1]. For instance, action games have been linked to enhanced attention control and visual-spatial skills. Gee argued that good video games are based on principles of learning and problem-solving [2].

Furthermore, games like *Minecraft* and *Portal* offer environments where creativity and logical reasoning are exercised. Research indicates that such games can foster an intrinsic motivation to learn and explore [3].

**Emotional and Social Aspects**  
Digital games can also have psychological and emotional benefits. Players often engage in goal-setting, experience success through repeated effort, and build resilience. Prensky emphasized that digital natives often find in games a meaningful outlet for expression and stress relief [4]. Cooperative games, in particular, can encourage social bonding and prosocial behavior [1]. Conversely, concerns persist regarding excessive gaming and exposure to violent content. Gentile et al. found that prolonged exposure to violent games can increase aggressive thoughts and behaviors [5]. However, the effects vary depending on the individual and the context of gameplay. Ferguson noted that other factors, including family environment and personality traits, mediate such outcomes [6].

**Educational Potential of Digital Games**  
Gamification and game-based learning have gained traction in educational research. Digital games are increasingly integrated into classroom settings to enhance engagement and learning outcomes. Squire emphasized the value of games in immersive learning, especially when students actively participate in historical simulations or scientific investigations [7]. Games like *Duolingo* and *Kahoot* demonstrate how gamified elements can sustain learner motivation. Researchers such as Gee [2] and Steinkuehler & Duncan have argued that digital games foster a “learning by doing” environment [8]. Moreover, digital games have been found effective in teaching STEM subjects and developing computational thinking. Papert’s early work on constructionism laid the foundation for understanding how learners construct knowledge through interactive technologies [9].

**Parental Perceptions and Concerns**  
Parents play a critical role in shaping youths’ digital gaming habits. Research shows that parents often hold ambivalent attitudes—acknowledging both the entertainment and educational value of games, while remaining cautious about screen time and content

[10].

Valkenburg et al. proposed that co-playing and discussing games can mitigate negative effects and promote understanding [11]. Active mediation is more effective than simply restricting access, as it enables parents to contextualize game content and set meaningful boundaries. Cultural context also influences parental perceptions. In collectivist societies, concerns may focus more on academic distraction and moral development. Meanwhile, in individualistic societies, autonomy and personal choice may play a more prominent role [12].

**Youth Perceptions and Engagement**  
Youth generally view digital games as a central part of their leisure and social life. Games offer not only entertainment but also a sense of achievement, identity exploration, and social interaction. Lenhart et al. found that gaming is nearly universal among teenagers [13].

The role of digital games in identity formation is especially significant during adolescence. Turkle argued that virtual environments allow for experimentation with roles, values, and affiliations [14].

Yet, engagement levels and motivations differ. Some youth are drawn by challenge and mastery, others by social connection or escapism [15].

### Summary of Review of Literature

The literature presents a complex picture of digital games. While potential benefits include cognitive development, motivation, and social engagement, concerns about content, screen time, and behavioral effects remain. The perceptions of both youth and parents are shaped by cultural, psychological, and contextual factors. Digital games, when used mindfully and with appropriate support, offer significant educational potential. Further research, especially in diverse cultural settings, can deepen our understanding of these dynamics and inform responsible game design and media literacy efforts.

### III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- 1) To identify parents’:
  - a) Understanding of the types of digital games their children play.
  - b) Perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of digital games.

- c) Challenges they face in managing their child's digital gaming habits.
- 2) To explore youth perspectives regarding:
  - a) Their gaming habits and genre preferences.
  - b) The perceived educational and cognitive benefits of gaming.
  - c) Negative consequences on well-being due to gaming.
- 3) To prepare practical guidelines for:
  - a) Youth: promoting balanced gaming habits.
  - b) Parents: fostering constructive monitoring and alternative engagement strategies.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

A mixed-method approach was adopted to capture the complexity of perspectives among both parents and youth. Self-constructed tools were used for data collection.

- For Youth: A 25-question tool including 11 close-ended and 14 open-ended questions. The tool explored gaming duration, frequency, genre preferences, perceived benefits, and drawbacks.
- For Parents: A 28-question tool comprising 12 close-ended and 16 open-ended questions focusing on awareness, perceptions, concerns, and strategies regarding their children's gaming behavior.

The sample included 43 parents and a corresponding group of youth participants aged 15–19.

#### V. RESULTS

When it came to parents' perception of digital games, the following findings were pertinent:

**Awareness of Game Types (Objective 1a):** About 46.5% of parents identified action and adventure games as the primary genres their children played. Parents demonstrated moderate awareness of game content, often identifying titles through observation rather than engagement.

**Perceived Benefits (Objective 1b):** Approximately 51.1% of parents observed improved problem-solving and strategic thinking in their children due to gaming. Parents acknowledged educational value in simulation and puzzle games but remained cautious about their long-term impact.

**Perceived Drawbacks (Objective 1b):** Parents expressed concern over violent content, addiction, decreased academic performance, and limited physical activity. Over 50% noted the

presence of aggression in games as a negative influence, consistent with social learning theory (Samra, 2018).

**Challenges in Regulation (Objective 1c):** Parents employed time limits, content filtering, and reward-based systems to regulate gaming. Despite these efforts, many found it difficult to consistently monitor or engage their children in alternative activities.

When it came to the youths' perception of digital games, the following findings were relevant:

**Gaming Preferences and Habits (Objective 2a):** Action games were favored by 52.1% of youth participants. Youth often played daily, ranging from 1 to 4 hours, citing enjoyment, challenge, and competition as motivators.

**Perceived Benefits (Objective 2b):** Youth highlighted enhancements in reflexes, critical thinking, decision-making, and hand-eye coordination. Games with puzzles or strategic elements were appreciated for their educational value.

**Drawbacks Noted by Youth (Objective 2c):** Respondents acknowledged fatigue, eye strain, disrupted sleep, and reduced physical activity. A few admitted to academic distraction and decreased real-world social interaction due to excessive gaming.

**Educational Potential (Objective 3):** A segment of the youth population (approximately 38%) recognized that games could support learning—particularly language acquisition, historical simulations, and mathematical problem-solving—if designed with clear educational intent.

#### VI. DISCUSSION

The following themes emerged as important and relevant:

**Cognitive and Educational Benefits**  
Several studies support the findings that gaming can enhance cognitive flexibility, spatial skills, and strategic reasoning [16]. The current research mirrors this by confirming that both parents and youth observed improvements in problem-solving through digital games.

**Concerns About Aggression and Addiction**  
Social learning theory suggests that children internalize behaviors observed during gameplay. Violent games, often incentivizing aggressive

actions, may normalize aggression [5][17]. This aligns with parental concerns that frequent exposure to such content could lead to behavioral imitation.

#### The Paradox of Parental Perception

While parents identified tangible benefits in their children's cognitive development, they remained wary of psychological and behavioral issues. This duality highlights the need for greater digital literacy and awareness among parents.

#### Gendered Gaming and Monitoring

Though not a primary focus, some data suggested boys engaged more with gaming than girls and that mothers reported greater concern over gaming content, while fathers emphasized performance and time management.

#### Youth Autonomy vs. Parental Regulation

Many youth found parental restrictions excessive and limiting, indicating a communication gap. Bridging this gap through co-play or structured discussions could improve mutual understanding.

### VII. IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY

This research underscores the need for a balanced approach to digital gaming. While educational potential exists, unchecked gaming can have adverse effects. Encouraging co-operative games, educational titles, and setting healthy boundaries is key.

For Parents:

- Educate themselves about game content and ratings.
- Engage in periodic discussions with their children.
- Model balanced screen use and offer recreational alternatives.

For Youth:

- Self-monitor gaming duration.
- Diversify leisure time with physical activities.
- Explore games with educational or creative elements.

### VIII. CONCLUSION

Digital gaming is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon influencing modern youth. This study reveals that both parents and youth recognize the benefits and risks associated with gaming. While games can promote cognitive and educational

development, excessive use and exposure to inappropriate content pose real challenges.

With structured guidance and informed parental involvement, digital games can be transformed from potential distractions into powerful educational tools. As society increasingly moves into digital spaces, understanding and integrating responsible gaming into family and educational practices is not just beneficial—it is essential.

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