



Internet usage and parents' views about internet addiction¹

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Abstract

The purpose of this study; families to identify the measures they have taken to avoid students' internet addiction. Families which have children between the ages of 10-18 and an internet connection at home were included in the research. Residing in the central town of Konya with 15 families were interviewed. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes. Descriptive analysis was made in the analyzing of data come by at the end of research. In conclusion, the biggest reason for families to connect to the internet is supporting their children to study and preventing their children go to internet cafes. Families said that their children are using the internet to play the game. About half of families agreed verbally with their children about using internet, but any family does not agree in writing. Twelve families do not use any filter program when they connected to internet. Families understand that their children are addicted to the internet, spending more time on the internet, having communication problems with their families, being disruption of daily life patterns, attending classes and failing lessons. If families' child is addicted to internet many of them warn verbally and say ban the internet, only four of families said get help from experts. Results of research findings compared with literature and discussed.

Keywords: internet addiction; parents; internet usage;

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Introduction

Rapid developments in science and technology led to changes in traditional education understanding. According to this new understanding, students are not passive receiver of information, they are individuals who reconstruct, research information and responsible for their own learning. As a result of this, the need for technology and particularly for the internet -which has become the greatest source of information today-, has increased and parent felt that it is obligatory to provide their children access to internet. According to the results of the survey carried out by Turkish Statistic Institution indicate that internet usages increase day by day in Turkey in parallel with the world. In 2007 the rate of internet access at home was 18.9%, this rate increased to 24.5% (Turkstat, 2008). With increase in the rate of internet access, the internet was started to be used in a variety of fields. In a survey carried out by Prime Ministry Family and Social Research Directory of General on internet usage and family in 2008, it was found out that 67.7% of family members use the internet to get information, 40.4% use the internet for education, to study and to do research (GDFSR, 2008).

Although so much increase in internet usage rate lead to great advantages in accessing and sharing information, it also brought about some hazards as well. Although these hazards are valid for all age groups, they particularly become a more serious risk for children as internet is a network accessible by everyone and its usage cannot be controlled. It is possible to list the hazards of the internet as follows (Odabaşı, Kabakçı and Çoklar, 2007):

- Easy access to web sites with pornographic or negative and dangerous faith content.
- Lack of references for sites with useful content to which children can easily access,
- Internet causing inter family conflicts,
- As individuals do not reflect themselves as they are, internet can lead to identity conflict,
- Internet causing addiction

In parallel with development and change in internet technology, people's internet usage aim and period increased rapidly. People's spending most of their time on line leads to

problems and behavioral disorders. As a result of this, internet addiction emerged as a new type of addiction. Internet addiction is called as excessive use of internet which affects people's behaviors badly (Young, 1998).

Today, five types of internet usage are mentioned. These are virtual sex addiction, chat addiction, information addiction, game addiction and gamble addiction (Young, Pistner, O'Mara, and Buchanan, 2000; Dejoie, 2001). One can have the characteristics of only one of these types of addiction and also show the characteristics of more than one type of addictions at the same time. Therefore, many studies have been carried out on the reasons why people become internet addicted. King (1996) finds out that the reasons of internet addiction mostly stem from people's socialization needs. Besides socialization; people need to get rid of loneliness (Morahan-Martin, 2005), when worried and depressed (Young and Rodgers, 1998) shyness and the desire to explore oneself (Chak, 2003) internet ease access to forbidden content, it helps taking risk, playing games (Ekinci, 2002) can be given among the reasons for addiction.

Considering the reasons for internet addiction, the people with the highest risk to catch this addiction are depressive (Ha, et al, 2007), introvert (Cao, Su, Liu and Gao, 2007) and alone (Whang and Lee, 2003). They are mostly middle-aged people, children and students (Şendağ and Odabaşı, 2007; Özsoy, 2009) and especially 12–18 aged group adolescents (Öztürk et al 2007).

It is thought that the reason why addiction risk of 12–18 age groups is high stems from the development period they are in. In a study by Huang (2006) reported that this period is a period of identity achievement period. In a study by Ceyhan (2008), s/he reported that increasing number of adolescents show symptoms of internet addiction, the most important factor in this is the developmental needs of the adolescent.

A lot of scales were developed to determine people's internet addiction levels or to find out whether they are internet addicted or not. In the scale Young (1999) developed to measure internet addiction, s/he lists the following behavioral changes in 12–18 age groups;

- Using computer/internet for a long time,
- Decrease in course grades, not being able to stop being at the computer/internet even if s/he wants,

- Not being able to do homework and similar responsibilities,
- Having negative emotions in the case of lack of internet,

Denying to be spending too much time on the internet although they do actually spent too much time.

Aim

The aim of this study is to get the views of parents' internet usage and internet addiction. In line with this aim, the sub-aims of this study are determined to be:

1. Do parents use internet usage agreement or filter program on the internet?
2. Why do parents provide their children with internet access?
3. What do parents think their children do on the internet?
4. What kind of precautions do parents take to prevent their children's being internet addicted?
5. What are parents planning to do in case their children become internet addicted?

METHOD

Participants

In the study, we tried to get in touch with parents with 10 to 18 year old school children and internet access at home. In the spring of 2009, a total of 15 parents, 9 being mothers and 6 being fathers, were contacted resident in Konya province. These people were interacted one to one and voluntarily participated the interviewed. Of the people interviewed 5 were primary school graduate, 3 were secondary school and 8 were university graduate. The parent interviewed had a total 24 children 16 of whom are attending primary school and 8 of whom are attending secondary school. Eight of these families explained that they had internet access at home for more than 2 years, 4 had internet access for 1 to 2 years and the rest 3 had internet access for less a year.

Data Collection Tool

In this study, we sought to find answer the question "What are the precautions families take to prevent students becoming addicted to the internet?" In this context, semi-structured interview questions were prepared. The draft questions prepared were offered to expert view

and after necessary changes and corrections were made, the questions were given their last shape. The interview questions used in the study are as follow:

1. Do you use internet usage agreement or filter program on the internet?
2. Why did you provide your child access to the internet?
3. For what purpose do you think your child use the internet?
4. What kind of precautions do you take to prevent your child being addicted to the internet?
5. What would you do if saw your child being addicted to the internet?

Data Collection Process

For the study 15 parents resident in Konya city center who have internet access at home and children aged 10 to 18 attending school. These people were given a short interview to inform why they were chosen for the study and the aim and details of the study and method. It was expressed that participation to study is voluntary and the approval of parents who were planned to be interviewed were received. For each parents interview was planned on the date and hour they determined. The interviews were performed as approximately 20-minute sessions in which the parents were asked the questions in the interview form and their responds were recorded with a voice recorder. After interviews were completed, the responds for each question were assigned to related indexes and the data obtained by making classifications in terms of question were made ready.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

In the analysis and interpretation of descriptive analysis of data quantitative and qualitative data was used. In descriptive analysis data is summarized and interpreted. In this method, direct quotations are used frequently to reflect the views of people interviewed (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2000).

In this study, the data obtained from interviews were directly saved on the computer in their original form upon receiving approval from parents interviewed. To determine under which themes data obtained from the study will be researchers examined all data together and formed the themes. By making use of these themes an "Interview Encoding Key" was developed. Researchers and an expert from the field read the data forms independently and coded them into appropriate themes. After that, the consistence of encodings was compared. As the result of reliability study carried out in this way was over .70, it was concluded that

markings were reliable. Data processed according to interview encoding key was described and the results were supported by making direct quotations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings and Discussion about the Use of Internet Usage Agreement

In academic studies a internet usage agreement between parents and children is recommended. Stewart (2000) recommended an internet usage agreement between parents and children on sending and receiving e-mail, surfing in the web media, downloading and sending files. As for internet usage agreement, Microsoft (2010)- on its official website- recommends parents to make a series of rules which they accept themselves and by their children and to put these rules beside the computer or any other shared area in the house. In a study titled "Internet Usage and Family" carried out by Prime Ministry General Directory of Family and Social Research, it is suggested that a document called internet usage agreement to be prepared and observed (GDFSR, 2008). In the study, parents were asked whether they made internet usage agreement with their children. It was found out that no parents had a written internet usage agreement with their parents. Only 6 of the parents stated that they made a spoken internet usage agreement, the rest, that is, 9 parents stated that they did not make a spoken or written agreement with their parents.

Findings and Discussion about the Usage of Filter Program on the Internet and Having the Computer in Shared Area

On the internet there are sites which have harmful content especially for children (racism and terrorist activities, tempt using alcohol, drugs and gambling, secret or wrong information). To get rid of possible risks of the internet the most common solution is using filters (Quintina, 2002). Filters prevent entrance to illegal and harmful sites. The filter programs to be used control children's surfs on the internet are to be set up by computer experts. In this study, parents were asked whether they use filter programs on the computers their children use. Only 3 of the parents stated that they used filter programs on their programs.

Experts recommend that the computer children use not to be in children's bedroom but in shared area of the family. On it own website Microsoft (2010) recommends that computers be in the shared area of the family. In their studies, Woodard and Gridina (2000), and Shields

and Behrman (2000) 20% of the parents put the computers in children's personal rooms. Yet another study by Arnas (2005), it was reported that 21% of the families which have computers at home have the computer in children's room. In this study, parents were asked whether the computers children use are in the shared area of the family, but only 4 parents stated that they had the computers in the shared area of the family.

Findings and Discussion about the Reasons Why Parents Provide their Children Internet Access

The themes, frequencies and percentages obtained from parents' responds are given Table-1:

Table 1
The Reasons Why Parents Provide their Children Internet Access

Themes	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
<i>Academic Development</i>	33	60
<i>Studying Lesson</i>		
<i>Doing research for Homework</i>		
<i>Gaining General Culture</i>		
<i>Precaution for unwanted behaviors</i>	14	25
<i>Not to go to internet café</i>		
<i>Not making undesirable friends</i>		
<i>Keeping the child under control</i>		
<i>Entertainment and Communication</i>	8	15
<i>Playing games</i>		
<i>Communication with friends and relatives</i>		
<i>Socialization</i>		
	55	100

Parent stated a total of 33 views related to academic development theme and this number makes up 60 per cent of the total frequency of responds to this question. Parents stated that they provide internet access to their children so that they study lesson, do homework and for general acculturation. All of the parents indicated that they provide internet access to their children to help their academic development. Besides, parents expressed a total of 14 views about preventing unwanted behaviors. Under these themes, parents explained that they mostly provided internet access to prevent their children going to internet cafés. Below are some examples about parents' views about the issue:

“The courses and homework at school are generally on the internet. We purchased internet access as we do not want them to go to internet cafes. We felt the need to have internet access at

home so that we can keep them under our eyes and know and follow which sites they enter”
[G11]

“To be frank, the reason why we have internet access at home is that our child does not go out and does not have bad friends, and for lessons” [G1]

In another study by Odabaşı (2005), it was pointed out that families regard internet as an economical environment and believe that it increases academic success and is a requirement of modern life. In their study, Shields and Behrman (2000) stated that parents believe that the internet helps children do their homework. Arnas (2005) stated that parents mostly have computers at home so that their children do homework (study lesson).

Besides, parents interviewed expressed 8 views about entertainment and communication theme. Under this theme, 2 of the parents stated that they provided internet usage opportunity to their children to contribute their socialization. On this issue, one parent stated that:

“...before all for his socialization and to increase his/her human relations.” [G6]

Findings and Discussions about the Purposes Children Use the Internet According to Parents

All of the parents stated that their children use the internet to play games. Eleven people among the interviewed stated that their children use the internet as assistance to their lessons. Besides, 7 of the parents interviewed stated that their children use the internet to communicate with other people 3 of them stated that their children use the internet to watch film and to listen to music. Below are some examples from parent statements about their views:

“When my child is on the internet, he downloads secret information about games, about war games. I do not think that he make us of the internet for his courses. In general, he searches game passwords and says I can't pass this level of the game, how can I pass it? ” [G9]

“My son generally plays game, other than this he uses the internet for his homework and uses the facebook to communicate with his friends and to form group” [G7]

This finding is similar to the findings in the literature Ersoy and Yaşar (2003) reported that almost half of the parents stated that their children a few times do research on the internet to study lesson.

Findings and Discussions about The Precautions Parents Consider Taking If Their Children Get Addicted to the Internet

Parents have expressed a total of 59 views about this issue. These views are group under 3 themes. The themes, their frequencies and percentages obtained from parents responds are given in Table 2.

Table 2.

The themes Constructed in relation to the Precautions Parents Consider Taking If Their Children Get Addicted to the Internet

Themes	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
<i>Preventing or Limiting Usage</i>	26	44
<i>Preventing Internet Access</i>		
<i>Limiting Internet Access</i>		
<i>Preventing Using the Computer</i>		
<i>Warning and Punishment</i>	20	34
<i>Verbal Warning</i>		
<i>Punishing</i>		
<i>Physical Violence</i>		
<i>Getting Assistance and other Precautions</i>	13	22
<i>Getting assistance from teacher/expert</i>		
<i>Systematic desensitization</i>		
<i>Giving Other responsibilities</i>		
	59	100

In case their children become internet addicted, the precaution parents (44%) mostly think of taking is to prevent and limit internet usage. Parents expressed 26 views about this issue. Below are examples from the views parents expressed on this issue:

“I would try to prevent, if it does not work I gradually restricts the internet usage. If they do not work, I turn of the computer and internet access and do not led them go to internet cafes and cut down their allowances. I give money accordingly and carefully and prevent such a thing” [G11]

“To be frank we impose some restrictions. At least I can demount some part of the computer or put some password programs” [G3]

“There are some programs which allow using the internet between certain hours, and then cut internet access automatically. I would use them.” [G14]

The other precaution parents (34%) think of taking if their children become internet addicted is to warn and punish children. Parents expressed 20 views on this issue. About this theme, parents mostly stated that they would verbally warn their children. Below are some examples of parents' views on this theme:

“I would say do not do, go to bed, study lesson, I would wan him/her.” [G2]

"I would talk to him/her if he does not understand I would speak the language he understands."

[G4]

"If I feel that my child get addicted to internet, I would speak with him/her first." [G9]

In the literature, the studies on this issue it is suggested that if children show indications of internet addiction, expert assistance is to be received (Bozkurt and Şimşek, 2006; Demirutku, 2006). In this study, parents expressed 13 views about receiving help and other precautions if their children become internet addicted. While 4 of the parents stated that they would apply to expert help if they cannot find a solution with other methods, 3 of them stated that they would directly employ experts. Below are examples from parents' views on this issue:

"But when I see that precautions do not work, I would take expert view as the last resort." [G14]

"I cannot deal with it, I would apply to an expert" [G3]

"Probably as I said before- I would firstly apply to an expert" [G7]

Experts suggest that children are to be directed to activities like sports, games or reading books in line with their abilities in order that they do not become addicted to the internet. In this study, some parents indicated that they could take different precautions about this. Below are examples from the views parents expressed on this issue.

"I would give him/her other responsibilities. I would try to leave no free time for him/her" [G15]

"With my own methods, there is a method called systematic banishment. That is if s/he s internet addicted s/he is online for most of the time. I could decrease this time gradually by decreasing it 10 min. a day, 15 min or half an hour a day" [G12]

SUGGESTIONS

The following suggestions can be made in the light of the findings of this study in which parents views about internet usage and internet addiction:

- To spread the use of internet usage agreement, parents are to be informed about internet usage agreement which is recommended to be made by parent in cooperation with their children.
- Parents are to be informed about filtering programs so that children can use the internet more safely.
- Given education to parents can be useful to make children use the internet for desirable purposes.

- Parents are to be informed that internet addiction is an important problem and they are to be recommended to get expert assistance in case they face such a problem.

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