

Vietnamese pre-schoolers' use of tablet devices and emergent literacy: An ecological investigation

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Abstract (343 words):

As Vietnam's economic growth and consumer demands continue to accelerate, more Vietnamese families are now able to access smartphones or tablets. Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development (1979) theorises that children's development is shaped by the multiple environments that they live in including the microsystem (the home and school settings), the exosystems (the family's social networks), and the macrosystem (the larger social, cultural contexts that embed the other systems). A growing body of literature has found that the use of digital devices has positive influences on young children's early learning processes such as letter sound knowledge, reading, writing, and solving problems both at home and at school. However, little is known about the impact of other factors outside the home and school environments on young children's emergent literacy development through such digital device use. This research, therefore, aims to investigate the ecology of pre-schoolers' use of tablet devices and emergent literacy in Vietnam. We conducted an ethnography with 42 mother-child dyads in the Ho Chi Minh City Metropolitan Area in the South of Vietnam, which involved in-depth interviews with the mothers and observations of both the mothers and the pre-schoolers in their homes to answer three research questions:

RQ1: How do the home and school environment influence Vietnamese pre-schoolers' tablet use to develop their emergent literacy?

RQ2: How do the family's social networks influence Vietnamese pre-schoolers' tablet use to develop their emergent literacy?

RQ3: How do Vietnam's social and cultural contexts influence Vietnamese pre-schoolers' tablet use to develop their emergent literacy?

We found that although digital devices have not been formally incorporated into pre-school education in Vietnam, the mothers strongly regard the smartphone and tablet as learning tools that gave their children a distinct edge in educational achievement. This perception also influenced their tablet purchase decisions and to regard these devices as strategic tools to cope with Vietnam's stressful education system and cram-school culture. However, their growing adoption and appropriation of these devices is not matched by a concomitant understanding of the benefits and risks of introducing such devices to children in early childhood.

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