



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**WHAT CHILDREN LEARN FROM TELEVISION PROGRAMMES: THE
CASE OF SERDANG AREA, SELANGOR**

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FBMK 1999 15



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1999



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OF SERDANG AREA, SELANGOR**

**BY
MUTAZ OSMAN OMER**

**Thesis submitted in Partial fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master
of Science in the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia**

April 1999



*To my beloved parents and
memory of Alkamel and Sit Alniffor Osman Ali Ballal*



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my profound appreciation and gratitude to the following persons and institutions that have contributed to the completion of my thesis:

- Assoc. Prof. Dr. Musa Abu Hassan, thesis supervisor, for his continuous guidance, support and understanding throughout my study in UPM. His professional approach and patience has given me the confidence and zest to work harder.
- Assoc. Prof. Dr. Salleh Hassan and Dr. Ezhar Taman, thesis co-supervisors, for their valuable guidance, comments and suggestions.
- The 200 respondents and their teachers in Serdang schools for their valued cooperation and hospitality which made this thesis possible.
- The lecturers and staff at the Department of Communication in UPM who helped me in one way or another.
- My special thanks to my friends- especially Dr Awad Ebrahim, Al Tieb Saeed, Khalid Yousif, Adam Mohammed Ahmed and Sami Ali for their support, advice and suggestions. I extend my deepest thanks to them.



- I owe a lifelong to my parents, brothers, and sisters for their continuous support and encouragement. Very special thanks and appreciation forwarded to my beloved mother for her valuable support, understanding and encouragement, which become the main motivation factor to complete this study.
- To those not mentioned here, the help and friendship offered will always be remembered.



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Abstract of the thesis submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master Science

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April 1999

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The primary objective of this study was to find out what children learn from TV programmes. The specific objectives were: (a) to explore children's favourite TV programmes (b) to determine the extent of children's TV viewing (c) to ascertain whether parents control over their children's TV viewing (d) to find out the benefits of TV viewing for children as perceived and (e) find out the type of skills that children acquire as a result of watching TV programmes.

The study was conducted on 200 children at three grade levels--70 third graders, 64 seventh graders and 66 eleventh graders--in the public schools of Serdang. Data were collected through questionnaires and analysed using SPSS program to compute the frequency distributions percentage and cross tabulation.



The results indicated that children acquire skills as result of watching TV programme, such as academic, motor and social skills. They learn some factual knowledge from programmes; much of this knowledge learned from programmes, which are not educational by design. They learn facts which are interesting to them but which may or may not have utility for personal success in school. They also learn to perform sequences of behaviour and they may actualise these behaviours in subsequent interaction with peers.

However, the study showed that the parents are the major factor in controlling what programmes their children watch. The results indicated that the parents paid attention on which programmes and what the type of programmes their children can watch.

The study focuses on the topics of restoration for the children to adapt method of learning. Therefore, parents, teachers and government should devote their attention in selecting and showing the programmes.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi syarat untuk ijazah Master Sains

**APAKAH YANG DIPELAJARI OLEH KANAK-KANAK DARIPADA
PROGRAM TELEVISYEN: SATU KAJIAN KES
DI KAWASAN SERDANG, SELANGOR**

Oleh

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April 1999

Pengerusi : Profesor Madya Musa Abu Hasan, Ph.D.

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Objektif utama kajian ini ialah untuk meninjau apa yang dipelajari oleh kanak-kanak daripada rancangan televisyen. Secara khusus, objektif kajian ini ialah: (a) untuk menentukan program yang menjadi kegemaran kanak-kanak; (b) untuk menentukan jumlah masa yang digunakan oleh kanak-kanak untuk menonton televisyen. (c) untuk memastikan sama ada ibu bapa melakukan pengawasan terhadap anak-anak mereka yang menonton televisyen atau tidak; (d) untuk mengetahui kebaikan menonton televisyen kanak-kanak sebagaimana tanggapan mereka dan (e) untuk meninjau jenis kemahiran yang diperolehi oleh kanak-kanak sebagai natijah daripada menonton rancangan televisyen. Kajian ini dijalankan terhadap 200 orang kanak-kanak daripada tiga peringkat gred, iaitu 70 orang pelajar gred tiga, 64 orang pelajar gred tujuh, dan 66 orang pelajar gred sebelas di sekolah kerajaan. Data di kumpul dengan menggunakan soal selidik dan dianalisis menggunakan program SPSS untuk pengiraan taburan kekerapan, peratusan dan tabulasi silang.



Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa sebagai natijah daripada menonton rancangan televisyen, kanak-kanak memperolehi kemahiran seperti kemahiran akademik, pergerakan fizikal dan sosial. Daripada rancangan televisyen mereka dapat mempelajari pengetahuan tentang fakta dan kebanyakan pengetahuan ini pelajari daripada rancangan yang bukan direka bentuk khusus untuk pendidikan. Mereka mempelajari fakta yang menarik minat mereka yang mungkin atau mungkin tidak memberikan manfaat untuk kejayaan peribadi mereka dalam pembelajaran di sekolah. Mereka juga turut mempelajari cara menampilkan beberapa bentuk tingkah laku dan mungkin melakukan tingkah laku yang dipelajari semasa berinteraksi dengan rakan sebaya.

Walau bagaimanapun, kajian menunjukkan bahawa ibu bapa boleh menjadi salah satu faktor utama yang mengawasi bentuk program yang ditonton oleh kanak-kanak. Hasil kajian juga mendapati bahawa ibu bapa mengambil perhatian terhadap rancangan dan jenis rancangan yang boleh ditonton oleh anak-anak mereka.

Kajian ini memberi tumpuan kepada perkara-perkara bagi membolehkan kanak-kanak memilih kaedah pembelajaran. Oleh itu, ibu bapa, guru, dan kerajaan harus memberikan perhatian terhadap pemilihan dan penayangan program di televisyen.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides clarification to the research background. It also states the research problem and identifies its objectives and significance as well as the limitation of the study.

The Study Background

Since the early 1950's when television became a mass medium, social scientists have been interested in the impact of the medium on society. One of the areas, which have occupied the most attention, has been the role of television in the lives of young children. Psychologists, sociologists and communication theorists have attempted to assess what children learn from the medium and the implications of that learning for their behaviour.

Television is not only an entertainment medium but also an educational and informative. It is to instruct and entertain. It is without doubt that television brings information to children. It goes without saying that usually all of us hear phrases and observe some patters of behaviour whose origin could be nowhere else but the television

Children most likely say that they learnt such phrases or behaviours from the television programmes. Studies done in the area have shown that children are bound to absorb somewhat more from the television per hour of contact than adults do. Compared to adults, they are straining by their very nature to learn all they can about the world they are entering, while adults already have a passing familiarity with it (Jarvis, 1996). The study also indicated that these results are especially true of pre-school children who are most likely to pick up some things from their time with television. This is because, being the newest arrivals, they are the ones who have the most to learn. It is true that their genetic inheritance may have established a fraction of their behaviour and outlooks, but they are in need to learn everything fresh. In this early period they need to learn about vocabulary, numbers, considerate behaviours, items of general knowledge among other skills and things.

Television programmes should meet the needs of this segment of society. It should provide children especially pre-schoolers with the needed vocabulary that at this stage they are avaricious language learners. It should bring much more language for them than anyone set of parents use. In addition, it should provide them with programmes that help them learn the basic knowledge or basic operating information regarding the components and work of the world around them. Moreover, television should also provide programmes that learn children the non-verbal patterns of behaviour and conduct that help them function well in the society.

Demers (1989) stated that children watch television to simply escape boredom or everyday problems. Television allows them to forget a bad day, to ignore an upset parent, or to avoid a scholastic assignment. Still, other children use it for social utility. That is, they watch TV to have something to talk about with one another. “ Music Television” is a primary subject of discussion for most kids. It is a show composed on the part of the viewer. True, not all shows can or should be educational, but shows like MTV, when watched in excess, can become addictive to children. He also said that there are some children who find refuge in a television set. They use it to escape from the outside world. Those children with low self-esteem are sometimes the worst abusers. The greater self-esteem a child has the less television he or she will watch. Children, who have difficulty making friend or interacting within a group, generally watch more TV. These actors and actresses become friends. Although most children can differentiate between reality and fiction but they sometimes find it difficult to understand.

Demers (1989) found that another factor affecting television viewing, is a family’s social class. If a family is less educated and has a low income, youth tend to have less alternative leisure time activities and devote less time to their education.

Bryant and Daniel (1983) stated that childhood is a period when the energy and impulsiveness of the new responsibility has to come into conformity with the dictates of society so that, later on, the new infant will be able to play a productive adult role and



human community will endure. Children are the nation's sole guarantee that a future exists and that life will endure. For this end, both the social system and the family of a child, mainly the parents are responsible for providing a healthy future community. It is right that parents endorse their infant with love. If the adult were ever to cherish anything in life, it would be an offspring. However, besides love parents should have to take their duty to raise up their children so that eventually they will be able to step into the roles of the departing adults and be socialised. Parents should undertake the responsibility to channelling the drives, teaching skills, separating right from wrong, parcelling out the real world and revealing to their children as the capacity to understand it grows. For this purpose, parents can either provide some kinds of encouragement sometimes or sanctions based on the behaviour of the child. This responsibility should come before the responsibility of the social system.

The responsibility of the social system towards children is complementary to that of the parents. The social system usually plays such a role by providing the opportunities to children for enrolment in educational institutions beginning from the nursery, kindergarten to school. In addition to teaching the child the writing and reading skills, actually these institutions play a role of socialising the child. Every child in such institutions learns from the official dosages provided at school as well as from his/her mates. Before the birth of new mass media technology, such institutions are the only place and means where children learn writing, reading and socialising. However, in the age of the modern communication technology social systems take advantage of another effective means to play their significant role towards children. This judgement is right of

all mass media but it can be apparent with the emergence of the television (Bryant and Daniel, 1983).

Television has intruded into the difficult business of children rearing. It has joined the other socialising forces in the community, which surround and shape children personalities. It is no doubt that television has played its significant role towards new generations. Nevertheless, programmes screened in on the television are not always for the benefit of child. It is right that most of them are for his/her betterment. Such programmes should be accompanied with parents' proud attention and home visits by educational specialists and other materials. That in the US experience a television series by the name *Sesame Street* was screened in the early 1970s. A study was later conducted to evaluate the nature of the series as an educational television program showed that the children who had benefited from the series were those who had received special encouragement to view by their parents and visits by educational specialists and colourful supplementary materials, while those didn't receive such an encouragement to view benefited little (Jarvis, 1996).

Such educational programmes should be considered properly before screening as to meet the acceptance of the parents. This is because children in this stage usually submit information from the television, indirectly, to other relatives including parents for comments and evaluation. When the child recites what he/she has got from the television to his/her parents, he/she knows that learning is not over until the parent has respond (Jarvis, 1992).



As an informative medium, television should also play the informative role towards children. That most of the children, especially for scientific and historical realities, rely more on what they receive from this medium. In addition to what school children may learn from the formal curriculum at schools, they still in need of another source for such information. That what they may learn at schools is less appealing to them compared to television, which provides three dimensions of the picture or image. According to Bryant and Daniel (1983), features in the television have an informative role in cognitive process of children. These include structuring the flow of context, signifying or suggesting context and providing modes of mental representation. As such, television should not satisfy with its educational role towards children but enhance it with informative one.

Baran and Davis (1995) said that those who argued for the active theory of viewing claimed that social learning theorists generally believe that the child is an active, cognitive and social being but television is seen as providing powerful influence that the child becomes reactive in its presence. The pessimistic view of children's viewing and cognitive abilities led social learning theorists to over-estimate the power of the medium and under-estimate the influence that individual had in determining effects.

According to Ralph (1987), young children are conscious of television from the time they begin to talk, if not from the time they walk. Short attention spans, giving rise to boredom, indifference and inexperience provide young children with built-in defences,

making them content to play in front of the set, or lap-sit without paying particular attention to the programmes. Often, it is the irrelevant feature, the random movement, and the sudden flicker, which captures attention of the very young. Children six to eight find it difficult to follow a plot, but they are developing a grasp of the interpersonal relationships seen on the screen, particularly those involving children, although much of the story content is conceptually beyond them. Ralph (1987) indicated that by the age of three, an estimated one-third of the children make fairly regular use of television. This proportion mounts rapidly until by the time school starts. It is the rare child who is not a regular viewer. Perhaps the fairest generalization on children's use of television is that which indicates that television and school are equal shareholders in the waking time of the elementary school child.

One of the first large-scale studies of children and television was conducted by Schramm, Lyle and Parker (1961) using primarily survey methods, the authors found that television was one way of spending leisure time for young children which diminished in importance as they grew into adolescents, and that if television was unavailable, children would find another way of spending time, usually with other media such as comics and records. The authors explored many parameters of television use by children and they found there was little evidence that it constituted a threat to child morality or school performance. Inspired by the Schramm study, British investigators Himmelweit and Vince (1988) studied some of the effects of viewing on such variables as grades and delinquency, by comparing viewers with non-viewers on many variables related to socialization. They found, for example, that ten years old viewers who were of average or

low intelligence scored higher than the non-viewing counterparts on tests of knowledge about geography, general science, music, and sports. However, viewers scored no higher than non-viewers did on tests of current events, despite the fact that such content occupied a great deal of the total programming. This finding was one of the first clues that what a child learns from the medium is relevant to his social life and not necessarily the type of knowledge useful for success in school, in that much of knowledge was “people and places” in geography, music, science and sports, rather than explanations or generalisations. They found out that “a child may gain valuable knowledge from non-instructional programmes”. Such acquisition of facts without active seeking “incidental learning” and cites anecdotal evidence that children often reject content which adults perceive as “good for them”.

Ralph (1987) said that television appears to make a limited contribution to the lives of most children and to play a secondary role in its effects. It provides amusement, entertainment and it fills time. Evidence indicates those children’s attitudes; values and beliefs can be shaped by television, but the amount of information and the strengths of existing attitudes among children regulate such effects. This places adults, parents in particular, in a crucial role. If they take the time to view and discuss programmes with children, make their beliefs and attitudes clear in words and deeds, maintain healthy emotional relationships with children. Any disturbing or damaging effects of television on children, by and large, are likely to be minimised. Implicit in this statement is the inference that any effects are likely to be negative. If so, negative effects occur by the default of the masters of television who determine program content. In its present form,

television appears to have little positive impact. Where it has negative impact, it represents also default of particular parents.

Statement of the Problem

Study concerning television's effects on children focuses on a portion of a larger area of scientific investigation, observational learning or the way in which the behaviour of children changes as a result of exposure to the actions and values of others. Studies of observational learning demonstrate that such exposure can change varied behaviours, such as a child's willingness to help others, his ability to display self-control, and his learning of language rules. Observation of others on film can increase learning of unfamiliar behaviours, increase sharing and decrease fear (Driscoll, 1993).

One of the interesting facts emerging from surveys of large number of people is that many think television, any television, is educational. Parents most often mention education as its major advantage for children, and most sixth-grade subjects in one study conducted by Palmer in 1989, the study showed that they learn during at least some of the time they spend on television. The respondents said they derive lessons and solutions to real-life programmes from Soap Operas and acquire medical knowledge from Doctor programmes. Several respondents also mentioned learning about methods of tracking and catching criminal from Police detective series.

Moreover, in the Malaysian case, a study conducted by CAP in 1983. For the purpose of this study, 13 programmes on TV Malaysia were watched for a one-week period, between 23 and 29 January 1983, to determine the extent and types of violence in these programmes. Five of these programmes were cartoons, four were crime or detective programmes, two were space programmes aimed at children, and two were serious dramas. The study also showed that children are very susceptible to the examples of behaviour they watch on the screen.

Regarding children's favourite TV programmes, Alhabshi (1995) indicated the programmes which, children have named as their favourite such as what 's –up-doc; Power Rangers; Superman; *Ultraman*; *Doraemon*; *Usop Sontorian*; *Hiburan Minggu*; *Ini*; *Pop Kuiz*; *Pi Mai*; *Pi Mai Tang Tu*; *Sambal*; *Rumah Kedai*; *Lontong*.

Therefore, this study attempts to look at what children learn from TV programmes. It seeks to find answers to the following questions: what type of skills that children acquire from TV programme? Does watching television help children to gain skills? Do Parents control their children viewing? How much time do children spend on television? What are children' favourite TV? Finally, what are their opinions and suggestions about television programmes?

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to find out what children learn from television programmes. This objective encompasses the specific objectives, which are:

1. To explore children's favourite TV programmes.
2. To determine extent of children's viewing time.
3. To ascertain whether parents control over their children's television viewing.
4. To find out the benefits of watching TV for children as perceived
5. To find out the type of skills that children acquire as a result of watching television programmes.

Significance of the Study

This study is important for the usefulness of its findings to media specialists in Malaysia. It is hoped that this study will highlight the efforts of media men to help children to acquire useful knowledge and information as a result of watching television. The results of this study will further help the understanding of children's opinions and suggestions and will hopefully assist in developing television programmes. Academicians, policy makers, television programmes planners and parents may also use the findings of this study in their efforts towards providing a better guidance to children.

In addition, this study can shed some light on what children learn from TV programmes and the findings of this study are essential in providing information about the skills, behaviours and general knowledge which children can acquire as a result of watching TV programmes.

Limitation of the Study

The study was conducted in the Serdang area. In choosing schools from which to draw the sample, however, attempts were made to select a variety of schools that would reflect the children community. Any conclusion drawn from this study applies to the children in Serdang area only and cannot be generalised for all children of Malaysia.