

Online Experiences and Life Satisfaction in Korean Children : Exploring Age-Related Differences

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Introduction

The widespread use of digital technology and the internet has deeply integrated into children's daily lives, significantly influencing their quality of life (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Today's youth, often referred to as the digital generation, frequently engage with various digital media, impacting not only information accessibility and learning but also their interpersonal relationships and communication networks (Kim, 2023). Childhood and adolescence are crucial periods for self-identity development and social relationship building. Previous studies suggest that online experiences during these stages play a vital role in psychological well-being and life satisfaction (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009). However, alongside positive online experiences, negative factors like cyberbullying and exposure to harmful content can adversely affect children's quality of life.

In South Korea, the internet usage rate among teenagers stands at 99.5%, reflecting nearly universal access (Korea Internet & Security Agency, 2023). Despite these advancements, the life satisfaction of South Korean children is 67%, ranking among the lowest in OECD countries (UNICEF Innocenti, 2020). Life satisfaction is closely related to mental health, social relationships, and school life (Proctor et al., 2009), serving as a protective psychological factor against negative life events (Cheon et al., 2014). Improving children's life satisfaction is critical not only for their current well-being but also for sustainable national development (Bradshaw, 2015). Thus, understanding the impact of online experiences on children's life satisfaction is increasingly important.

Despite the significance of these issues, research examining the comprehensive relationship between children's online experiences and life satisfaction remains limited. Previous studies have largely focused on the negative impacts of digital media use, emphasizing restrictions on media consumption and the role of parental supervision (Kim, 2023; Lee, 2015). Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effects of children's online user experiences on life satisfaction, utilizing data from the 6th Korean Children's Quality of Life Survey (2023). By examining age-related differences, this research seeks to provide insights into intervention strategies that promote healthy digital lives and improve life satisfaction among children.

Methods

This study utilized data from the 6th Korean Children's Quality of Life Survey(2023) conducted by Save the Children and Seoul National University. The survey includes self-reported data from 5,629 children (2,796 10-year-olds and 2,833 12-year-olds) in South Korea. The present analysis was based on 3,080 children (1,468 10-year-olds and 1,612 12-year-olds; 47.8% male and 52.2% female) with no missing values. Multiple regression analysis was employed to investigate the association between online user experiences and life satisfaction, as well as to examine differences by age.

Online user experiences were categorized into five areas: skills, access, mediation of internet use, risks and harms, and bullying. Seven variables were used as independent variables: digital utilization skills (average score of 12 items), internet usage (average score of weekday and weekend usage), parental instruction regarding internet use (average score of 9 items), protective software installed by parents (total score of 7 items), cyberbullying victimization (average score of 2 items), exposure to risky content (total score of 7 items), and internet addiction (average score of 5 items). The dependent variable was life satisfaction (average score of 6 items).

Results

The results of analyzing the effect of online user experiences on life satisfaction at ages 10 and 12 are as follows:

First, for 10-year-olds, higher levels of online bullying victimization and exposure to risky content were associated with lower life satisfaction. In contrast, for 12-year-olds, digital utilization skills, internet addiction, internet usage, and exposure to risky content had a significant impact on life satisfaction. Higher digital utilization skills, greater internet addiction, and increased exposure to risky content were linked to lower life satisfaction. Notably, internet usage was found to have a positive effect on life satisfaction.

Second, when comparing the two age groups, cyberbullying victimization had the greatest impact on life satisfaction at age 10, while internet addiction had the largest effect at age 12.

Table 1 Regression models predicting quality of life(10-year-old)

구분		B	SE	t	F	adj.R2
(상수)		3.045	0.349	8.724	180.329***	0.423
Gender		-0.013	0.072	-0.178		
1	Peer relationship	0.681	0.050	13.608***		
	Parent relationship	0.780	0.051	15.252***		

	Academic achievement	0.086	0.047	1.822		
	Economic status	-0.346	0.051	-6.795***		
	Health status	-0.283	0.049	-5.729***		
	(상수)	4.182	0.439	9.531		
	Gender	-0.053	0.072	-0.740		
	Peer relationship	0.647	0.050	12.875***		
	Parent relationship	0.754	0.052	14.602***		
	Academic achievement	0.080	0.049	1.635		
	Economic status	-0.305	0.051	-5.968***		
	Health status	-0.258	0.049	-5.237***		
2	Digital utilization skill	-0.006	0.005	-1.342	87.846***	0.435
	Cyberbullying victimization	-0.382	0.101	-3.775***		
	Internet addiction	-0.156	0.060	-2.577		
	Parental instruction of the Internet use	-0.016	0.062	-0.261		
	Protective software installed by parents	-0.014	0.017	-0.869		
	Internet usage	0.020	0.023	0.882		
	Exposure to risky content	-0.119	0.052	-2.288*		

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001, Gender(ref.=male)

Table 2 Regression models predicting quality of life(12-year-old)

	구분	B	SE	t	F	adj.R2
	(상수)	1.297	0.337	3.846		
	Gender	-0.244	0.074	-3.296**		
	Peer relationship	0.725	0.055	13.265***		
1	Parent relationship	0.991	0.047	20.926***	249.437***	0.481
	Academic achievement	0.159	0.046	3.467**		
	Economic status	-0.168	0.053	-3.196**		
	Health status	-0.295	0.047	-6.318***		
	(상수)	2.359	0.437	5.399		
	Gender	-0.209	0.074	-2.833**		
	Peer relationship	0.719	0.055	13.142***		
	Parent relationship	0.927	0.049	19.047***		
	Academic achievement	0.160	0.047	3.381**		
	Economic status	-0.118	0.052	-2.268*		
2	Health status	-0.252	0.046	-5.435***	125.619***	0.501
	Digital utilization skill	-0.014	0.006	-2.534*		
	Cyberbullying victimization	-0.133	0.109	-1.226		
	Internet addiction	-0.281	0.056	-4.989***		
	Parental instruction of the Internet use	-0.020	0.060	-0.340		
	Protective software	0.019	0.015	1.238		

installed by parents			
Internet usage	0.061	0.023	2.632**
Exposure to risky content	-0.169	0.035	-4.797***

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001, Gender(ref.=male)

Conclusion and Discussion

This study analyzed the impact of online user experiences on the life satisfaction of Korean children by age, confirming that positive and negative experiences in the digital environment have different effects on children's quality of life. For 10-year-olds, life satisfaction was diminished due to cyberbullying and exposure to harmful content, while for 12-year-olds, internet addiction and excessive digital engagement acted as negative factors. Conversely, appropriate levels of internet usage were found to have a positive effect on life satisfaction among 12-year-olds. These results provide important implications for the need for age-appropriate digital literacy education and protection strategies.

In particular, it was found that cyberbullying had the most significant negative impact on 10-year-olds. According to research by the Korea Information Society Agency on media usage behaviors and restrictions among children and adolescents, 54% of children under 10 have their use of smart devices limited by their parents, compared to only 43.2% of children aged 10 to 15 (Kim, 2024). This indicates that children aged 10 are at a stage where they begin to use smart devices and the internet more autonomously. Therefore, educational support that equips children with the ability to avoid online risks and effectively cope with them, as well as protection from cyberbullying and harmful content, is essential.

For 12-year-olds, it was identified that the level of internet addiction had the most negative impact on life satisfaction. Notably, for 12-year-olds, an increase in digital utilization skills was associated with lower life satisfaction, indicating that improved technical abilities do not necessarily enhance children's life satisfaction. However, it was also found that a moderate level of internet usage can positively influence life satisfaction in this age group. Thus, interventions should focus not only on limiting internet usage but also on educating and encouraging the proper use of digital media to prevent internet addiction.

In summary, this study confirmed that both positive and negative impacts of digital technology and internet usage affect children's life satisfaction, highlighting the need for differentiated digital literacy education and intervention strategies based on age. The fact that experiences in the digital environment have dual effects emphasizes the necessity of tailored digital literacy education, enabling children to utilize digital devices correctly rather than simply imposing usage restrictions. Furthermore, future research should compare the effects of digital

literacy education across diverse cultural contexts. Such studies could lead to more comprehensive digital literacy education strategies.