



A Qualitative Study Exploring Parent's Perspectives on Children's Screen Time and its Effects on Their Occupational Performance

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Introduction

Background

As a society, electronics and technological advancements have become more common and a popular form of productivity, whether it be to socialize or work in an accessible manner, but what are the long-term effects on the children growing up in this digital age? According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), 8 to 10 year olds spend about six hours a day using screens, 11 to 14 year olds spend nearly nine hours a day using a screen, and 15 to 18 year olds spend roughly seven and a half hours a day using a screen (CDC, 2018).

Theory: The Interactional Theory of Childhood Problematic Media Use (IT-CPU)

According to Rega and colleagues (2023), the IT-CPU is currently the only theoretical framework that is specifically intended to explore key risks, protective factors, underlying psychological processes, and contextual factors that are involved in children developing and maintaining potential problematic media use (PMU). This theory interprets the factors that potentially contribute to the development of PMU in childhood and how to maintain some of these factors for potential intervention strategies in the future.

Occupational Therapy (OT) and Screen Time

Despite the available literature regarding screen time effects on sleep and physical activity, there is a lack of research available regarding parent's perception on how screen time usage can have an impact on social participation and behavior challenges in their children (Eirich et al., 2022). OT practitioners (OTPs) can influence children's engagement in occupations by encouraging healthy habits and routines as well as educating both children and parents about screen time usage.

Methods

Design

This qualitative phenomenology study, **aimed to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of parents of school-aged children who use screen time in their daily lives.** The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions on a HIPAA-compliant Zoom platform. The interview script was developed based on information collected from a needs assessment, review of current literature available, and the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework-4 (OTPF-4)

Inclusion Criteria

- Parent of a child aged 5 to 13 years old who utilizes screen time
- Have access to the internet or a hotspot to participate in the Zoom meeting
- Participants were required to speak fluent English

Recruitment

- 4 participants were recruited to participate in this study through word of mouth and an online digital flyer published on UAB social media platforms

Data Collection and Analysis

The interview questions included demographic information, average amount of daily screen time, parent feelings, concerns and benefits, rules and regulations, daily routines and habits, changes in behavior and performance, and resources available for parents on screen time. Each interview took ~ 1 hour, was transcribed verbatim, and reviewed to ensure accuracy. Thematic analysis was used to identify themes. Methods to ensure trustworthiness of the data included use of a critical friend and journaling decision making.

Results

Table 1. Demographic Results

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	Marital Status	Employment	Relationship to Child	Child's Age	Child's Gender	Child's Race
A	34	F	Non-Hispanic White	Married	Unemployed	Mother	11, 9, & 5	M, M, M	Non-Hispanic White
B	41	F	Non-Hispanic White	Married	Employed full-time	Mother	13, 13	F, F	Non-Hispanic White
C	34	F	Non-Hispanic White	Married	Employed part-time	Mother	5	F	Non-Hispanic White
D	41	F	Non-Hispanic White	Married	Employed full-time	Parent	10	M	Non-Hispanic Black

Figure 1. How Much is Too Much?

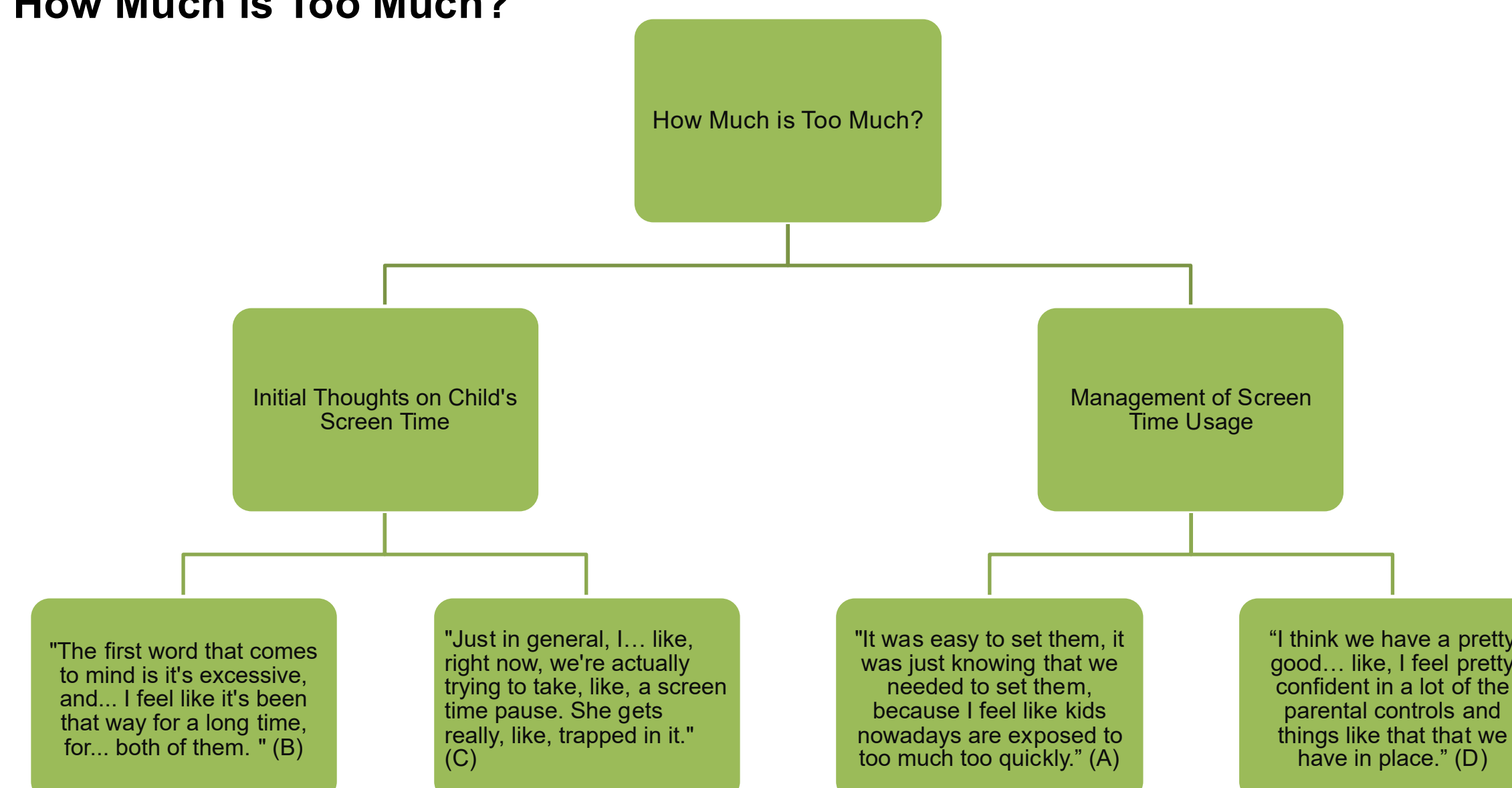


Figure 2. Influence on Parental Roles

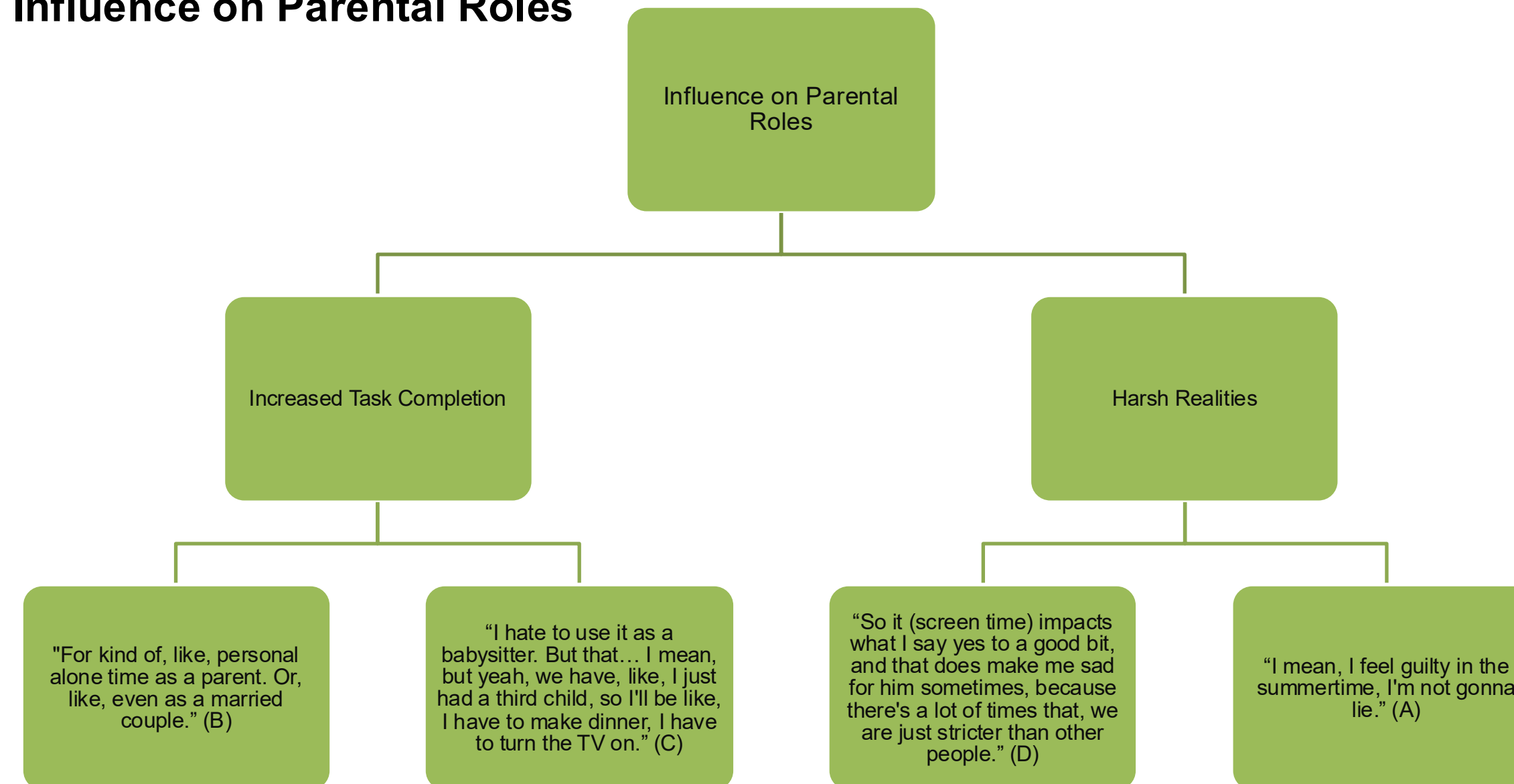
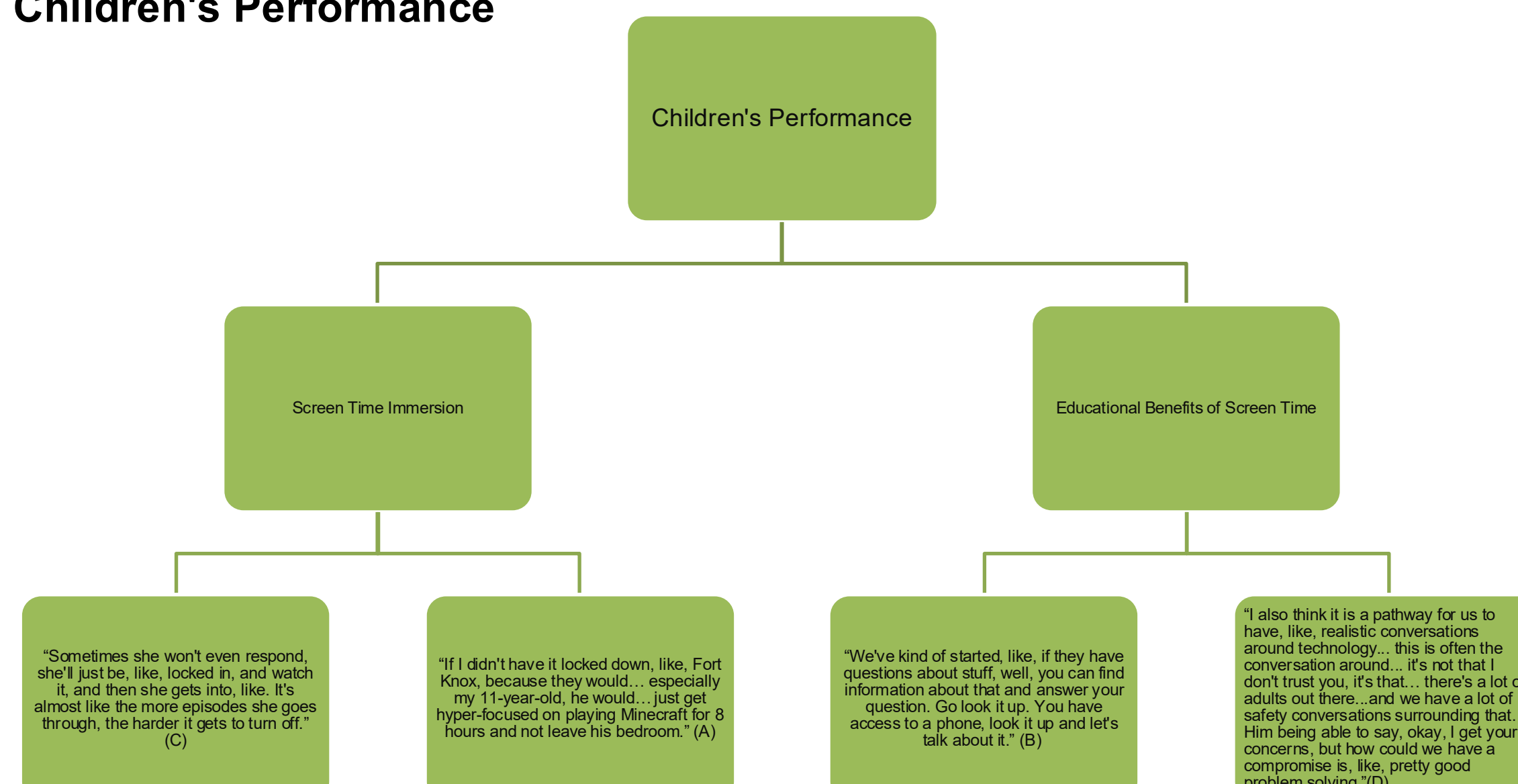


Figure 3. Children's Performance



Discussion

Key Findings

Cultural Norms

The results show that following the COVID-19 pandemic, parents noticed an increase in screen time usage. Parents also discussed how it is difficult to differ from the cultural norms around screen time usage in children.

Difficulties Managing Screen Time Usage

Parents discussed that the resources and recommendations available around screen time are limited because technology is constantly evolving.

The Online Babysitter

Parents reported increased independence in their daily lives when children engaged in screen time. It is important for parents to consider how this impacts screen time management in their household.

Limitations

Limitations included a small homogeneous sample, and concerns for potential researcher bias.

Implications for OT Profession

OTPs should stay mindful on how the social and technological components will continue to change as society continues to be more technologically advanced realizing the effect of environment on occupation.

Future Research

Future studies should explore different employment, gender, and races/ethnicities of parents to obtain a larger, more diverse US population to allow for transferability and saturation.

Conclusion

It is important to understand the struggles that parents face when making decisions around screen time usage in such a technologically advanced society. OTPs have the knowledge to provide services for healthy lifestyle and routine management to influence daily occupational performance. Pediatric OTPs must continue to educate themselves, patients, and patient's caregivers about the potential benefits and disadvantages of screen time usage.

References

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