Parents' views about Internet use of their children

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Abstract— Parents' views are primarily important for children's effective and secure use of Internet and protecting them against the threats of Internet. Therefore, this study aims at determining the views of parents about the Internet use of their children who attend a private elementary school in Turkey. Carried out through the qualitative research method, the research data of the study were collected from 33 parents and were analyzed by running descriptive analysis, which is one of the qualitative data analysis methods. As a result of the analysis, it was revealed that parents regard Internet as the most developed technology, a window opening to the whole world, and as a tool to attain information. Moreover, parents reported that Internet has positive and negative effects together. Parents stated that Internet use of their children has positive effects in terms of providing support to education, attaining information, establishing communication, and entertainment, while it has negative effects in terms of content and of individual, psychological and physical aspects. Based on parents' views, this study provides some suggestions regarding how children can use Internet safely.

Keywords—Internet, Internet and the child, Internet use of children, Parents' views.

I. INTRODUCTION

INTERNET is a crucial and indispensable technology of daily life since it is an information and communication web that enables people to attain information and to communicate. Thanks to this feature, Internet becomes a new and colorful play ground for children as well as an environment to communicate and attain information, while for adults, it mostly serves as a tool for communicating with others and attaining information.

By the end of 2007, there were approximately 20 million Internet users; however, this amount has reached to 26 million by September, 2008 [1]. Furthermore, according to the report

dated 2008 June of Internet World Stat, which provides statistics about Internet use on the basis of countries throughout the world; the number of Internet users in Turkey is 26 million. This number makes 36, 5% of the population. With this number of Internet users, Turkey has the ratio of 3,9% across Europe [2].

Recent studies on Internet use in Turkey have indicated that approximately 37% of the population use Internet and that 61,6% of these individuals use it at home while 37,6% of them at work and 21,8% of them at Internet cafes [3, 1]. Thus, when the profile of Internet users in Turkey is examined, it is seen that individuals who use Internet connect to Internet mostly at home where families live together. Additionally, it is ascertained that Internet cafes, where there are individual connection ports and hourly rate is paid for Internet service, are substantially preferred [3].

In addition, the same study also revealed the places where children use Internet [3]. Figure 1 graphically shows the places where children use Internet in Turkey.
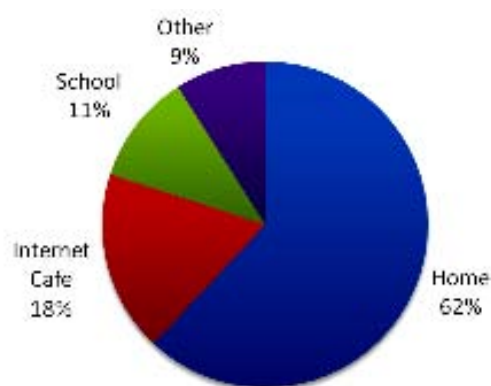
Fig. 1 Places where children use Internet in turkey

As can be seen in Figure 1, in Turkey, 62% of children use Internet at home, 18% at Internet cafes, 11% at school, and 9% in the library or in other places like in a friend's house. This reveals the fact that children use Internet mostly at home.

Furthermore, studies in literature indicated that age factor is an important variable for Internet use both in the Turkish society and in many other societies. Moreover, it was pointed out that as age decreases, Internet use increases [3, 4]. This denotes that children have more knowledge and ability to use this technology due to the fact that they encounter Internet

technologies earlier than their parents. In other words, while Internet is a new technology for parents, it is a familiar environment for children as they have known and grown up with it since their early ages.

In addition, some studies revealed that children's use of Internet has some positive effects such as access to information, communication, support to education and individual development. Additionally, it is asserted that children's Internet use also has some negative effects such as exposure to violence and pornography, addiction to Internet, delusion with strong advertisement components, abuse of personal and parental information, allocation of not enough time to activities for physical and social development [5, 6, 7, 8]. Moreover, the construction and co-construction processes should be taken into consideration since the communicative functions of Internet become increasingly important for people in general and for adolescents in particular [9].

One study carried out in Romania investigated the positive and negative effects of computer use on the psychological and social lives of 650 Romanian adolescents. The participants of the study, aged between 11 and 18 years, replied to a questionnaire of 36 questions related to computer activities. Regarding the time adolescents spend on computers, the results of the study revealed that adolescents spend a great deal of time on computers, approximately more than three hours a day. According to the results, adolescents tend to spend more time alone on their computers ignoring their social and family duties [10].

Another study examined the phenomenological description of Internet. The participants of the study were Turkish university students who reported their purposes for using Internet and the effects of Internet on their daily/social lives. The study was carried out on qualitative basis to get a better understanding of the perceptions of 20 Internet users. The data obtained were analyzed through thematic analysis. According to the results, Internet facilitates life in terms of the establishment and controllability of communication and the achievement of personal aims. On the other hand, Internet was found to have negative effects since it results in limitations in social relationships, interference with daily concerns, passivity/inactivity, difficulty in adaptation to real life, and physical illnesses [11].

According to a study conducted on children's Internet use in Turkey, it was emphasized that parents' views and attitudes are crucial factors for elementary children's productive use of Internet. In that context, a questionnaire of 17 items regarding the financial, social, educational and safety aspects of Internet was given to 94 parents in order to investigate the views of elementary school children's parents about Internet. The results indicated that the parents observe Internet as an economical media, rather unaware of the safety issues, besides they believe that Internet enhances academic achievement and it is a necessity in contemporary life. Moreover, it was found out that parents do not believe that Internet use affects family relations negatively [12].

On the other hand, based on the results of another study which was conducted on Internet use with 2000 mothers, 2000 fathers and 819 children in Turkey in 2008, it was asserted that the parents' aims at connecting Internet were primarily attaining information, then receiving education and searching, and finally for entertainment. Additionally, it was determined that parents considered Internet as an economical environment particularly for communication. However, parents thought that Internet hindered face-to-face communication and caused waste of time. Besides this, all the parents complained that their children spent too much time on computer and that Internet influenced the family communication negatively [3].

Furthermore, another study in literature investigated the effects of children on the parents' Internet access at home. The study was carried out with 38 families and 31 children through qualitative and quantitative research methods. The results pointed out that children have important effects on the purchase of Internet access and on Internet use at home. Additionally, it was concluded that Internet access and its use have become an important issue in terms of family quarrels [13].

In a study carried out in Israel in 2000, the research data were collected from more than 1000 families from all over the country. According to the results of the study, as the time adults spend on Internet increases, they start to damage their close relationships with their parents. However, when Internet is used as a tool for attaining information and for doing homework, parents approve such use of Internet and they become closer to their children. When Internet is used for other purposes rather than for doing homework, there occurs conflict of generations [14].

The effects of Internet on society were investigated in another study in 2004 in Pakistan. In the study, the effects of Internet on the society as a whole in Pakistan were detected as increased use of Internet, increased loneliness, depression, decreased social relations and weak family communication [15].

In the same way, a study conducted in Korea with 222 children studying at 4th, 5th, and 6th grades examined the relationship between children's Internet use and the time spent with family and the relationship between children's Internet use and the communication within family. The findings indicated that the total span of children's Internet use reduced the time spent with family; however, no relationship between children's Internet use and the communication within family was detected. In addition, it was revealed that parents' guiding their children to useful web sites and accompanying them while using Internet led children to use Internet for educational purposes more often [16].

Another study in literature focused on the factors that cause teenagers to engage in risky Internet behavior, especially on the factors regarding the development of identity. The participants of the study were 250 teenage students from 7 different high schools of Iasi, Romania. The participants, aged between 15 and 18 years old, responded to a questionnaire of 28 questions regarding online computer activities. The researchers of the study focused on the online construction of identity of the participating students. According to the survey results, the amount of the time spent online on Internet was found to be positively related to the preference for online relationships. Thus, the students had a high tendency to spend more time online ignoring their social or family duties [9].

Although teachers influence children's use of Internet and of computer at school, children who have a computer and Internet access in their homes where there is no parental support are likely to experience the feelings of loneliness and introversion [6].

Although the findings of studies on Internet both in Turkey and in other countries shared some similarities, basically, they differed. The most important reason for this difference might be the fact that societies, Internet technologies, Internet use, and the purpose for and way of using Internet have changed in time. In addition, culture and socio-economical status are some of the variables that influence these behaviors and such issues. The increase in children's Internet use and its positive and negative effects reported in related literature have increased the importance of parents' views about and their roles on children's Internet use. In other words, parents' views are primarily important for children's effective and secure use of Internet and for protecting them against the dangers of Internet. However, the fact is that there are a limited number of studies on parents' views about children's Internet use in Turkey.

The aim of this study is to determine the parents' views about Internet use of children attending a private elementary school in Turkey. In line with this aim, the following research questions are addressed:

1. What are the parents' views regarding the concept of "Internet and the child"?
2. What are the parents' views regarding the positive effects of children's Internet use?
3. What are the parents' views regarding the negative effects of children's Internet use?

II. METHODS

A. Research Model

This research was conducted through qualitative research methods.

B. Participants

A total of 33 parents whose children were attending a private elementary school in Turkey in 2007-2008 academic year participated in the study on voluntary basis. The demographic background of the parents participating in the study is given in Table 1 below.

Table 1 Characteristics of the parents participating in the study

Characteristics of Parents		Number
Parents' Education Level	Elementary School	2
	Secondary School	1
	High School	14
	University	15
	Post-graduate	1
Do they have Internet access at home?	Yes	31
	No	2

As indicated in Table 1; approximately half of the parents participating in the study were university and high school graduates while only two of them were elementary, one of them secondary school and one of them was at post-graduate educational level. Furthermore, approximately all of the parents in the study had Internet access at home, but only two of them did not have Internet access at home.

C. Data Collection

In the study, to collect the research data, a questionnaire of six open-ended items is used. It is stated that questionnaires with open-ended questions enable researchers to attain information that supports the concepts and theories in literature in accordance with their predictions [17]. In this sense, since this study attempted to obtain the parents' views regarding the positive and negative effects of children's Internet use, a questionnaire with open-ended items were used.

For the content validity of the open-ended items in the questionnaire, which were asked by the researchers in accordance with research questions in this study, two field experts and one qualitative research expert were consulted. According to the experts' opinions, the necessary arrangements were carried out, and the final version of the questionnaire with open-ended items was prepared. In the questionnaire, while two items were asked to define the characteristics of the participants, the other items were to determine the parents' views regarding the issue of "Internet and the Child" and the positive and negative effects of children's use of Internet. Before collecting the research data, firstly the consent of the director of the private elementary school and the parents' consents were gained. Furthermore, to ensure the validity of the data, the researchers accompanied the parents while answering the items in the questionnaire in order to explain the unclear items. After the data collection process, the data were entered into computer by one of the researchers. In addition, for the sake of the reliability of the study, the other researcher checked the data by comparing the data in the questionnaire with those on the computer.

D. Data Analysis

The qualitative data obtained in this study were analyzed through descriptive analysis as one of the qualitative analysis techniques. For the descriptive analysis of the data, firstly, on the basis of the data obtained, a thematic framework was constructed considering the literature and conceptual framework. According to the thematic framework constructed, the data were arranged after being read by the researchers [17, 18]. At this stage, for the reliability of the thematic framework and the data, two experts, who had field and qualitative research knowledge, were consulted. By comparing the markings of the researchers and those of the experts, the points of consensus and dissensus were determined. Using the formula

$$\left[\frac{agreement}{(agreement + disagreement)} * 100\right]$$

, which was offered by Miles and Huberman [19], the reliability of the study was calculated as %88. Since this value was over %80 [18], it was stated that the study was reliable. By finalizing the qualitative data and the thematic framework, which were rearranged as a result of the reliability and validity studies, the data were defined. The findings were discussed with the support of quotations from the raw data.

III. FINDINGS

In line with the aim of the study and as a result of the data analysis, the findings obtained were discussed under three main titles:

- The parents' views regarding the issue of "Internet and the Child"
- The parents' views regarding the positive effects of children's Internet use
- The parents' views regarding the negative effects of children's Internet use

While defining the themes and sub-themes during the data analysis, the parents' responses to the items in the questionnaire and the definition of their common views were taken as basis. Correspondingly, sample expressions related to the prominent themes and sub-themes were included in the findings.

A. The Parents' Views Regarding the Issue of "Internet and the Child"

The parents' views regarding the issue of "Internet and the Child" were gathered under the themes of "General Views about Internet", "Internet and the Child", and "Internet for Child" (Figure 2).
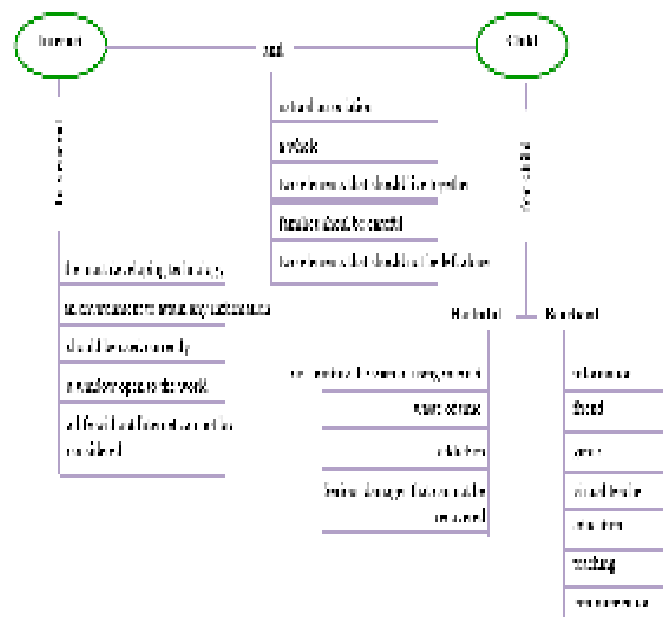

Fig. 2 Themes related to parents' views about "Internet and the Child"

It was revealed that the parents participating in this study defined Internet generally as "the fastest-developing technology", "an environment to attain any information", and "a window open to the world". Additionally, the parents reported that "Internet should be used correctly". Moreover, one of the parents' expressions that "a life without Internet cannot be considered" emphasized the fact that Internet is an indispensible technology.

Moreover, it was revealed that the parents explained the concept of "Internet and the Child" as "natural association" and "a whole". This can be interpreted with the fact that the parents agreed children's Internet use is a natural and contextual process. In addition, the parents emphasized that "families should pay attention to their children's Internet use" and that "the child should not be left alone on computer and should be observed". Parents also stated that "Internet and the child are two elements that should live together".

In this study, it was also revealed that the parents had different views about "Internet for the child". The parents emphasized the positive aspects of "Internet for Child" with the concepts of "information", "friend", "game", "virtual teacher", "education", "teaching", and "communication". On the other hand, according to the parents, the negative aspects of "Internet for Child" were "not limiting the span of using Internet", "causing waste of time", "leading to addiction", and "causing serious damages that cannot be recovered". Within the context of these expressions, it can be stated that the parents worried about their children's use of Internet as well as appreciated it in terms of their children's personal development.

B. The Parents' Views Regarding the Positive Effects of Children's Internet Use

It was found out that the parents' views regarding the positive effects of children's Internet use were gathered under the themes of support to education, attaining information, individual development, communication, and entertainment. Out of 33 parents participating in this study, three parents did not state any opinions about the positive effects of children's Internet use. In Table 2, the themes and sub-themes defined are presented with the frequency of responses.

Table 2 Parents' views regarding the positive effects of children's Internet use

Theme	Sub-themes	f
Providing support to Education		26
	Searching to do homework	11
	Providing support to lessons	5
	Attaining information	5
	Saving time while doing homework	2
	Preparing for future	2
	Taking lessons on Internet	1
Attaining Information		22
	Searching for the subjects in their own area of interest	7
	Attaining information easily and fast	7
	Unlimited Source of Information	3
	Using it as a library	2
	Being informed about technological developments	2
	Economical Environment	1
Individual Development		8
	Socialization	2
	Improving research skills	2
	Enhancing thinking skills	2
	Discovering creativity	1
	Improving decision-making skills	1
Communication		8
	Communication with friends	8
Entertainment		7
	Playing games	4
	Listening to music	2
	Variety of games	1

As seen in Table 2, among all the parents in this study, 26 of them agreed that Internet use has positive effects on children in terms of support to education, while 22 parents reported positive effects in terms of attaining information, 8 of them in terms of individual development and communication, and 5 parents in terms of entertainment. In other words, the parents agreed that the children's Internet use has positive effects in terms of support to education, attaining information, individual development, communication and entertainment.

Among all the parents in the study, 11 of them pointed out that children's Internet use has positive effects on searching for homework in terms of support to education. To emphasize how Internet supports education, one of the parents expressed that "he does research related to his lessons"; similarly, another parent reported that "it helps him do homework". Furthermore, five of the parents stated that Internet is a supportive environment for children's lessons and that doing research on Internet will provide them with the information necessary for their lessons. Besides this, two of the parents explained that Internet saves time while doing homework and they added that during their children's education life, it will be beneficial for future preparations. Furthermore, one of the parents explained that his child can follow his lessons on Internet easily, so he emphasized that Internet is useful for children.

Regarding the positive effects of children's Internet use in terms of attaining information, seven of the parents reported that their children searching for the subjects in their own area of interest and attain information easily and fast. One of the parents stated that Internet provides an opportunity in a safe environment to receive information that they wonder by expressing that "by using Internet at home, he can find what he wonders". Moreover, three parents emphasized that Internet is an unlimited source of information; two of them stated that it is like a large library. Furthermore, two of the parents explained that Internet enables children to be informed about the technological developments; in addition, one of the parents added that Internet is an economical environment to receive information.

Two of the parents stated that Internet contributes to their children's individual development and emphasized that Internet enables children to socialize and to improve their research skills and thinking skills. Additionally, the parents highlighted the fact that Internet helps children discover their creativity and improve their decision-making and analytic-thinking skills.

Finally, eight parents, who expressed that Internet is beneficial for children in terms of entertainment, explained that children use Internet to communicate with their friends. Four parents who considered Internet to be beneficial for children in terms of entertainment indicated that Internet is a useful environment to play games; similarly, two parents thought that it is an appropriate environment to listen to music. In this sense, one of the parents explained that "we see the benefits of game websites for children"; thus, he emphasized that playing games on Internet is beneficial for children. Furthermore, another parent stated that Internet is beneficial for children in terms of entertainment since it provides a variety of games.

C. The Parents' Views Regarding the Negative Effects of Children's Internet Use

The parents' views regarding the negative effects of children's Internet use were found to fall under four themes as content, individual, psychological, and physical aspects. Out of 33 parents who participated in this study, three of them did not express any opinion about the negative effects of children's use of Internet. The themes and sub-themes obtained are given in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Parents' views regarding the negative effects of children's Internet use

Theme	Sub Themes	f
Content		32
	Easy access to pornographic content	20
	Virus, Trojan, spam	3
	False information content	3
	Identity theft	3
	Game sites with violence content	2
	Unsafe information content	1
Individual		18
	Communicating with unreliable people	4
	Hindering studying	3
	Wasting time	3
	Spending too much time on computer	3
	Free-riding	2
	Retarding responsibilities (other duties)	1
	Unable to develop the talents	1
	Not having any hobbies	1
Psychological		16
	Internet addiction	6
	Deficiency in emotional development	2
	Causing loneliness	1
	Temper tantrum	1
	Unwilling to leave home	1
	Not enjoying activities with family	1
	Aggressiveness	1
	Avoiding face-to-face communication	1
	Isolating oneself from friends	1
	Breaking social life	1
Physical		1
	Eye problems	1

As indicated in Table 3, regarding the negative effects of children's Internet use, 32 parents in this study specified the content effects, 18 of them mentioned the individual effects, 16 of them emphasized the psychological effects, and only one of them reported the psychical effects. In other words, according to the parents, children's Internet use has negative effects in terms of primarily content, then individual, psychological and lastly physical aspects.

Among the parents participating in the study, 20 of them reported that Internet has negative effects on children since it allows easy access to pornographic content. One of the parents mentioned the most-stated negative effect in terms of content stating that "since there are harmful web-sites on Internet and it is very easy to access such sites, children are in great danger." Moreover, three of the parents indicated that they come up against viruses, Trojan and Spam due to the harmful content on Internet. In addition, three of the parents claimed that incorrect information content on Internet prevents children from getting reliable information and added that the forms filled out by children via Internet result in identity theft and abuse of personal information.

Four of the parents who emphasized the negative effects of Internet stated that they are concerned about their children since they communicate with unreliable people via Internet. One the parents explained this situation stating that "children using MSN or other web-sites establish communication with people who introduce themselves different." Three of the parents believed that children's Internet use results in spending an excessive amount of time on Internet and in wasting time and added that this situation prevents children from studying their lessons. Furthermore, two of the parents claimed that children become spoon-fed due to the ready-made information on Internet, which leads children to laziness. One of the parents stated that "children can not learn to search for something; they just click on Internet and find the ready-made information without searching or reading any source of information" and thus believed that this situation negatively influences the development of children's research skills. Moreover, another parent reported that children waste their time on Internet and that this situation hinders their individual responsibilities and prevents them from developing their skills and from acquiring a hobby.

Six of the parents indicated that Internet has psychological effects on children and causes addiction. One of the parents emphasized Internet addiction stating that "I am worried about Internet addiction that results from the over-use of Internet." In addition, the parents reported that Internet has negative effects on children's psychology since it leads children to loneliness, anger and aggressiveness. The parents also stated that children's Internet use causes them to dislike family activities, to avoid face-to-face communication and to isolate themselves among their friends and from social life. Moreover, one of the parents noted that Internet use causes eye diseases and thus influences children's physical health negatively.

IV. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Internet, which has changed the games of children, the homeworks of students, and the business lives of adults, besides its benefits, has brought some limitations especially for children. For this reason, it is essentially the parents' responsibility to help children benefit from Internet effectively and prevent their children from the potential dangers of Internet. Determining the views of parents about children's Internet use is of great significance for parents to carry out their related duties and responsibilities and will be the basis of future applied studies.

In this study that aims at determining the views of parents about the Internet use of their children attending a private elementary school in Turkey, based on the findings obtained, it was found out that parents consider Internet as the most developing technology and that they define Internet as a window open to the world and as an environment to get information. In addition, the parents were found to support the opinion that Internet has positive effects on their children thanks to its certain benefits, while it at the same time influences them negatively.

In this study, the parents were found to believe that their children's Internet use has positive effects on their children in terms of educational support, search for information, personal development, communication and entertainment. Depending on the views of the parents, the most positive effect of children's Internet use was found to be supporting education and finding information. This finding is consistent with the finding in literature that "the primary goal of individuals in a family in Turkey is to reach information" [3]. The finding of another study in literature that "children play a very important role in Internet connection and Internet use at home" [13] is parallel to the finding of this study that parents believe Internet supports their children's education.

It was also revealed in this study that parents consider Internet as an important source that children can especially use to do research for their lessons and to do their homework. The parents were also found to believe that Internet has a positive effect on children since it allows their children to gain time and develop their knowledge while doing homework and research. This finding of the study is consistent with the finding in literature that "parents believe that Internet enhances academic achievement and is a necessity of contemporary life" [12]. This finding also supports the view that "if Internet is used for doing homework and for obtaining information, parents approve the Internet use of their children regardless of the time they spend [16].

Moreover, it was also concluded that parents agree on the positive effects of Internet on children because they think Internet helps their children socialize and develop their research skills; that Internet makes it easier and faster to reach information; and that Internet provides children with the opportunity to establish communication with others and to entertain themselves. This finding of the study is consistent with the finding that "according to Turkish university students, Internet facilitates life in terms of the establishment and controllability of communication and the achievement of personal aims" [11].

The results of the present study further revealed that parents believe Internet has negative effects on children in terms of content, individual, psychological and physical aspects. According to the parents' views, the most negative effect of Internet use is found to be related to content aspect since the Internet allows easy access to pornographic content. Based on the parents' views in the study, it was concluded that Internet influences the personal development of children negatively because children establish communication with unreliable people and because Internet prevents them from studying their lessons. Besides this, it was found that children are exposed to psychological effects of Internet since they spend a lot of time on Internet and they thus become addicted to Internet, which also results in problems in family relationships. This finding of the present study is consistent with that of the study carried out in Romania with teenagers that "the Romanian teenager students had a high tendency to spend more time online ignoring their social or family duties" [9]. Moreover, this finding is also similar to that of another study carried out in Romania with adolescents that "Romanian adolescents tend to spend more time alone on their computers ignoring their social and family duties" [10].

Depending on the results of the study, parents are of the opinion that Internet is an inevitable technology for both children and adults and that children's Internet use has negative effects on them besides its positive effects. In addition, according to the results of the study, parents are thought to be aware of the positive and negative effects of their children's Internet use.

Based on the parents' views in the study, the following suggestions could be given for future studies:

- Awareness- and consciousness-raising trainings to be given to parents regarding children's Internet use could provide the basis for their reliable and effective use of Internet.
- Computer literacy trainings to be organized at different levels depending on the parents' skills in information and communication technologies could help parents spend good time on Internet with their children and could contribute to the development of the relationships in the family.
- Studies could be carried out to determine the parents' attitudes towards their children's Internet use.
- Especially focusing on regional differences all around in Turkey, research could be conducted to determine the effects of parents on children's Internet use.

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