**Games Are Not to Blame: Governments Should Not Ban Children From Video Games**

In 2021, the National Press and Publication Administration of the Chinese Government (2021) released a notice banning minors from playing video games except for three hours on weekends, which has sparked widespread debate. While some parents support this policy for preventing their children from game addiction, others have raised concerns about its potential drawbacks and unintended consequences. Moreover, the negative effects of video games are probably overemphasized “due to an abundance of studies on violent games, [they do] not reflect the potential of video games as a medium” (Ritterfeld & Weber, 2006, pp. 400-401). It is supposed that banning children from video games is not an effective solution, as it overlooks the games targeted at children and ignores needs of self-disciplined children who use games for leisure. In addition, the ban may have unexpected consequences, including deeper addiction and exposure to inappropriate content. Furthermore, it ignores the potential benefits of video games, such as improving cognitive skills and socialization.

Video games specifically designed for children should not be banned, as they can provide educational value and fair entertainment. For instance, educational video games such as Babybus (2022) that combine nursery rhymes or animations with simple graphics or shapes can teach children a basic knowledge of words and patterns. Adults are unlikely to play this type of games, while kindergarten children favor them. Thus banning children from this sort of video games means the target users are not available to these games, which seems unreasonable. Similarly, some public teaching aids conduct online quizzes or contests in the form of video games to attract young students’ attention. These types of games are not designed to be addictive and can be valuable tools for educational purposes. Still, one can argue that parents may have difficulty determining which games are appropriate for their children, but practical approaches are available to address this concern. The Video Game Content Rating Systems such as ESRB in the U.S. or PEGI in Europe provide guidance on which games are suitable for children (Brocato et al., 2017; Konzack, 2012). Instead of banning children from all video games, game publishers and governments should take responsibility for filtering video games. Therefore it is not a sound approach to prohibiting children from video games specifically designed for them.

Besides, some adolescents assert that their desire to play video games increases as a result of imposed restrictions. It is a common issue among “light players” who spend little time playing video games. For example, some may spend less than 20 minutes on video games daily without restriction. However, when they are restricted from playing the games for less than 3 hours a week, they will exhaust every minute to play these games. It is strange that they actually spent more time playing than before. This phenomenon can be explained by the theory of “strategic self-anticonformity”, which suggests that “an individual who feels a threat to his or her sense of freedom will experience discomfort that motivates re-establishment of that freedom.” (MacDonald & Nail, 2011, pp. 1-14). According to this theory, “light players” will suppose that they lose their freedom to play video games at the time they wish, then they are likely to consume more time playing games when they can do that. Thus a firm restriction may cause even deeper addiction to video games for “light players”. Restrictions may have even more severe consequences for “heavy players” already addicted to video games. Once their addiction to video games can not be resolved immediately, the process may lead to mental health problems, which are apparently ignored (Basu et al., 2021). Hence a firm restriction can lead to different types of psychological issues for different types of players. It is suggested that the government should “[advocate] for a balanced public addiction strategy” (Basu et al., 2021, pp. 1035-1036).

In addition, when children are banned from playing video games, they may seek out even worse alternatives. One such alternative is playing games published by unauthorized or foreign companies. Children possibly learn to use tools such as VPN (virtual private network) to visit websites or software forbidden by the government, gaining access to illegal video games. The potential danger of such games is evident, as the government does not monitor them, and they may contain offensive content. Then children are likely to be misled by the information due to their poor discrimination. It should be emphasized that most children do not actively seek out inappropriate content but turn to illegal games due to the restrictions imposed on them. Another common alternative to video games is short videos. According to the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (2022), about 65.54% of minors switch to short video platforms after their games are restricted. Indeed, these platforms provide personalized recommendations to minors to attract their attention. It is reported that the time they spend on short video platforms is even more than that of playing video games (State Administration, 2022). Moreover, instead of watching less informative 15-second videos, playing video games is “actively doing something with your brain at least” (Hewett, 2022, para. 9). It is strongly suggested that short videos do more harm than video games (Hewett, 2022). Therefore, directly banning children from video games probably insinuates that minors expose to worse content while potentially wasting more time.

Furthermore, video games are even beneficial to children in some aspects. For instance, completing tasks in video games usually takes a fixed amount of time, making it easier for self-disciplined children to control their time for leisure compared to some entertainment activities with unlimited playing time. Additionally, one research claims that “playing video games may foster real-world view benefits” (Engels et al., 2014, pp. 66-78). Unlike monotonous traditional games, video games offer diverse scenarios, rules, and operating methods that require children to think uniquely. Children manage to adapt to various situations and therefore improve their real-world adaptability, which indeed affects their thinking according to brainwave detection results (Griffiths, 2002). Furthermore, researchers also show that playing video games probably help develop fundamental language and social skills because games provide a common ground for discussion and interaction similar to real life (Griffiths, 2002). It naturally enables children to practice their language and social skills more often. While having concerns about excessive screen time is understandable, it is essential to acknowledge the potential benefits of video games for children. It is supposed that a balanced approach to video game use should be taken to enable self-disciplined children to derive benefits while minimizing potential risks.

Some may argue that children addicted to video games are not self-disciplined. They lack or disobey the guidance of parents and teachers. It appears that the government has to take measures to help these children. Nevertheless, the responsibility for monitoring children’s behavior is ultimately supposed to lie with parents or guardians. If parents strictly control how much children spend playing video games, they can prevent excessive use and reduce the risk of addiction. It is a win-win situation that parents safely expose children to video games and children delightfully play the games for leisure. In this case, parents can actively control their children’s behavior without government intervention. On the contrary, if parents do not manage their children’s time on video games, children will exhaust every method to access more games or turn to even worse live-stream, short video platforms. Without video games, these children are still wasting their time if their parents do not supervise them. Even worse, there are cases that some parents intentionally or unintentionally let their children obtain their ID numbers, allowing the children to log in to the game as adults. It poses a more significant problem than game addiction, as it suggests either parental encouragement or children’s privacy violations. Therefore, the restrictions are unnecessary if parents supervise their children. Instead of relying solely on government restrictions, education and guidance are essential for preventing children from becoming addicted to video games. Parents, teachers, and other guardians can work together to establish healthy habits and promote a balanced approach to leisure activities. Even if parents are unable to guide their children due to particular circumstances, other responsible adults can step in to provide support and assistance. If all the guardians can not help, neither can the government.

Video games are not to blame. Some games designed for or beneficial to children should not be indiscriminately banned if children play these games under supervision. Rather than banning all video games, it is supposed that the government should focus on regulating video games that contain inappropriate content. Prohibiting all video games from children may arouse several problems, including deepening addiction to video games or leading to even worse alternatives such as short videos. They may be exposed to dangerous information when trying to resist restriction as well. Although one can argue that the restrictions are to help children that disobey their parents’ guidance, it is crucial to recognize that self-disciplined children do not need such restrictions, while children addicted to video games may require more nuanced interventions. Therefore, banning minors from video games has a negative effect on normal children but has no significant effects on children addicted to video games. Ultimately, education and guidance are the most critical part. It is parents or guardians other than the government that should be responsible for the children. It is clear that children should not be banned from video games by the government.

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