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Persian websites for children and teenagers in Iran

Hassan Behzadi and Mahdi Zahedi Noghabi

Introduction

Over the past several years, the Internet has become important for research and communication for children. Children use the internet and associated digital tools to do their school assignments, for recreation, and for social experiences (Druin, 2005). There are two major reasons that the Internet has become important for children: first, they need computers and the information available on the Internet for their studies; and second, the Internet provides information on a variety of beliefs and thoughts (Mohammadnezhad, 2005). One study found that 60 percent of children know what a homepage is, but may not be aware of the role of a book's introduction. Fifty-seven percent of children know what hard disk is, while only one-third of them knew what hard cover books are (Marvi, 2002).

For children, the internet is a portal that makes them aware of cultures in different parts of the world. It also helps children to analyze their own culture critically and share this information with others (Lea, 2001). In 1997, according to studies of Grunwald institute, the number of American children between the ages of two and 17, who used the Internet, was 8 million. By 2000, it reached 25 million, and in 2005, the number was projected to reach 70 percent. Skillful programming and webpage development has made the Internet an important phenomenon for children (Shams, 2001). At the same time, the internet can create difficulties for some children (Durin, 2005).

Librarians have an important role in educating children and students about the internet. Librarians must be familiar with principles and methods of analyzing Internet websites in order to help children select the best sites for them and in designing websites themselves.

There have been many studies already done on analyzing websites for children outside of Iran. Fidel *et al.* (1999) found that more than 80 percent of students search information according to a hierarchical system and are not very skillful in their use of websites. Kuntez (2000) introduced five general criteria that can be useful for children to analyze internet searches: the size of information sources, accountability, classification, searching methods, and other properties such as help and spell checkers. A study done by Bilal and Kirby (2002) analyzed differences and similarities of information searches of website between children and adults. They found that 89 percent of adults could reach their favorite results, compared with only 50 percent for children.

Stevenson (2001) analyzed various educational web portals and classified them. Krock (2002) selected 610 databases and found them to be potentially useful even though they were not well structured. Gilute and Nielsen (2002) examined 55 children and 24 websites which were designed for them. They found that websites such as Amazon and Yahoo! are easier for children to use, whereas many other websites are too complex and difficult to use because of poor navigational confirmation, inconsistent navigation, and non-standard interaction options.

Cooper (2002) examined children's writing in relation to their physical and social development and their likelihood of successful communication in the digital environment. Large *et al.* (2002) recommended involving children in the process of designing websites to increase their usefulness. Nielsen (2005) analyzed how teenagers between the age of 13 and 17 use the Internet in which 23 websites were examined. Teens desired websites with more interactivity, graphics, and tend to focus on design to a great extent than adults. Madden *et al.* (2006) found that search success by teens related to experience and advice by parents and others.

Study design and results

The goals of this study were to examine: the condition of Persian websites for children and teenagers in terms of site support, design, contents, and promotion. We also examined and difference of websites which are supported by the government. The methodology we used in this study was based on the criteria of the American Library Association's Association for Library Services to Children's "Great websites for kids."

This study examined websites that were found in the first ten pages of Google search results using different words and phrases such as children, teenagers, website, child, teen, site, and sites. In general, 19 phrases were searched and the result was 1,900 websites. We then limited our study to those sites designed particularly for children and omitted those sites that were partly designed for children, which resulted in 18 Persian websites. Two of these sites could not be accessed due to technical problems which limited our study to 16 websites.

We analyzed websites in terms of authorship/sponsorship, design, content, and arrangement. Table I indicates that among the 16 websites studied, seven of them met less than half of the criteria.

Website authorship was analyzed by ten factors including: the name of the author, contacts, and free usage possibilities. The factors used to analyze design included factors such as colors, pictures, animations, and audio or video

Table I.

Analysis of websites: authorship, design, content, and arrangement

Name of site	Frequency percent of studied criteria				
	Authorship (%)	Design (%)	Content (%)	Arrangement (%)	Total (%)
Kodakaneh (children)	75	53	78	36	59
Lezzate Kardasty (handicrafts)	45	38	72	14	44
Kodak va Novjavane Shabakehe Amozesh (child learning channel)	40	47	78	23	50
Bachehaye Iran (Iran children)	55	42	67	41	49
Jazirehe Kodakan (children island)	75	47	83	64	62
Kocholoha (smallish)	35	45	67	23	46
Paygahe Dadehaye Olome Zamin (Earth science)	30	50	78	36	52
Portale kanone khorasane razavi (Khorasan's portal)	80	34	67	35	48
Jamee majazie kodakan (children's virtual society)	60	55	72	36	57
Nghashe Kodakan (children painting)	60	66	72	45	64
Portale Internetie Kodakan (internet portal of children)	40	50	50	27	46
Markaze nojome Kanone Parvareshe Fekri Kodakan (astronomy)	70	39	50	27	44
ROSHD Shabakehe mellie madarese (national network of Iran schools)	80	61	78	64	68
Kodekan dat O R G (children.org)	90	66	83	55	72
Kanone Parvareshe fekri (center of children and teenagers)	60	58	61	45	57
Taranehaye KOdakan (songs)	50	37	78	27	47

files, all of which play important roles to encourage children in using each website. The content factors for websites included purpose, the relation of site title with its topic and contents, defined user group, and if the information presented is correct or incorrect. Factors to evaluate arrangement included ease of use to locate needed information, searching possibilities, and general overall organization.

Some governmental organization and institutes that are involved with children's affairs in Iran require a good design to be effective. In this study six of the websites were government supported and the other ten were personal websites. We compared these websites in Table II.

Table II indicates that government-supported websites were stronger in terms of authorship and arrangement. The overall percentages for criteria are higher in personal websites.

Conclusion

One purpose of this study was to grade Persian websites for children, according to the examined factors as a guide to help teachers, parents, librarians, and students to choose the best websites. The obtained results indicated that there was a lack of standards in designing children websites. Unfortunately, some websites are using designers who are not familiar with the needs of children. Children are not a homogenous group, so we cannot

use the same theory or action for all sites. Children's skills, needs, knowledge, and the way they interact with technology and information changes as they grow (Markopoulos and Bekker, 2003). Involving children in website design along with child psychologists, teachers, and librarians can greatly improve a website. It is important to focus on standard solutions for designs that take into account the special needs of children (Gilutz and Nielsen, 2002). It is also important for school librarians to be familiar with significant and reputable websites for children, principles, and factors of website design.

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Table II.

Comparison of government and personal websites

Studied factor	Dependent type	Criteria value (%)
Authorship	Government	60
	Personal	59
Design	Government	48
	Personal	50
Content	Government	69
	Personal	72
Arrangement	Government	37
	Personal	36
Total	Government	53
	Personal	54

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