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SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

The Significance of Online Games for the Development of Social Competences in Early School-Age Children

Online games today constitute not only a form of leisure activity but also a space for diverse interactions among participants. In the case of early school-age children, such activity may form part of their everyday functioning, while the game environment may create situations in which various social behaviours are manifested. From a pedagogical perspective, this raises the question of whether this type of environment can be deliberately used in activities aimed at developing children's social competences.

This issue constitutes the starting point of the dissertation, which is devoted to the significance of using an original online game for the development of social competences in early school-age children. The study assumes that participation in an online game is not equivalent to the development of these competences. What may be important are the characteristics of a particular gameplay setting, the way in which the activity is organised, the nature of the tasks assigned to participants, and the type of interactions occurring between them. The research focused on three areas of social competence: cooperation, coping with difficult situations, and respect for rules and norms. These areas were selected because of the importance of these skills for children's functioning in school and peer environments and because the corresponding behaviours could be observed in situations organised as part of the research procedure.

The main aim of the research was to determine the significance of using an original online game for the development of social competences in early school-age children. The study sought to compare changes occurring in the analysed areas in the experimental and control groups. It also had a practical dimension, related to identifying the possibilities of using this type of solution in pedagogical practice and formulating guidelines for its application. The theoretical foundations of the study encompassed the social competences of early school-age children and the social dimension of online games. The theoretical assumptions adopted in the dissertation provided the basis for operationalising the competences under investigation and designing the research procedure.

The study was grounded in the positivist paradigm and conducted using a quantitative strategy within a pedagogical experiment design. The research included 40 children aged 8 to 10 years. Eligible participants were randomly assigned to two equally sized groups: an experimental group and a control group. In the experimental group, the experimental factor consisted of the original multiplayer online game *Farm Adventures*, developed specifically for the purposes of the study. The intervention was conducted in natural school conditions over the course of one semester during weekly sessions.

The *Farm Adventures* game made it possible to organise a range of activities requiring, among other things, cooperation, communication, joint decision-making, responding to emerging difficulties, and observing established rules. Measurements were carried out before the intervention began and after it had been completed. Children's behaviours were assessed using an original observation sheet designed to measure the social competences of early school-age children. Observations were conducted during specially organised task situations. The research situations and the sessions involving the game were also audiovisually recorded, and the collected material was used as a supplementary source of information about children's behaviours.

The analyses revealed different patterns of change depending on the area of social competence examined. Statistically significant differences in changes between the experimental and control groups over time were found in the areas of cooperation and observing rules and norms. In both cases, a greater mean increase in scores was recorded in the experimental group. No comparable differentiation was found regarding coping with difficult situations.

The analysis of individual behaviours made it possible to characterise the results in greater detail. In the area of cooperation, particularly noticeable increases were observed in ratings concerning joining in shared work, listening to others and responding to their ideas, and accepting group decisions. Regarding observing rules and norms, the greatest increases concerned recognising that rules were in force and explaining their meaning, whereas changes related to applying rules in practice and taking other participants into account were less consistent. In the area of coping with difficult situations, greater variability in children's responses was observed, including both continuing to act despite obstacles and making use of guidance, as well as cases of withdrawal and expressions of frustration.

The supplementary analysis of the audiovisual material demonstrated an association between the way task situations were organised and the manifestation of particular social behaviours. This was especially evident in the case of cooperation.

The results indicate that the significance of using the original online game should be considered in relation to the specific area of social competence and the nature of the activity being organised. The original contribution of the research involved the development of the *Farm Adventures* game, the preparation of the research situations, and the construction of the observation sheet. The findings also provided a basis for formulating recommendations for pedagogical practice concerning the use of this type of activity in work with early school-age children.

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