DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18048671

THE IMPACT OF ONLINE GAMES ON THE FORMATION OF SOCIAL COMPETENCE AND EMPATHY IN ADOLESCENTS

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the impact of online games on the formation of social competence and empathy in adolescents based on a review of scientific literature. It has been identified that digital games—particularly multiplayer and socially interactive games—may have a positive influence on the development of adolescents' communicative skills, cooperation, emotional understanding, and empathic relationships. At the same time, it is noted that games containing violent content and excessive engagement in gaming activities may lead to a decrease in empathy levels and difficulties in social adaptation. The article examines both positive and negative effects in a balanced manner and offers pedagogical and psychological recommendations.

Keywords: *online games, adolescents, social competence, empathy, digital environment, multiplayer games*

The rapid development of digital technologies has made online games a significant socio-cultural phenomenon in the lives of adolescents. Today, online games serve not only as a means of leisure but also as a platform for social interaction, teamwork, and the acquisition of emotional experiences [6]. Therefore, studying their

impact on the formation of social competence and empathy in adolescents on a scientific basis has become a pressing issue.

Theoretical Foundations of Social Competence and Empathy: Social competence refers to an individual's ability to act effectively in social situations, establish communication, cooperate, and adapt to social norms [8]. Empathy, in turn, is the ability to perceive and understand the emotional states of others and respond appropriately [5]. These two concepts are considered key indicators of personal development during adolescence. In a systematic review conducted by Wegmann et al., it was emphasized that digital games can serve as an effective tool for developing emotional competencies [3]. However, some studies note that online games with violent content may have a negative impact on levels of empathy [2], [7].

Results and Discussion:

The analysis of the literature indicates that the impact of online games on adolescents' social competence and empathy depends on the game content, duration of play, and social components. Multiplayer games promote the development of communication, negotiation, and teamwork skills [6]. At the same time, excessive engagement in violent games can lead to decreased empathy and social adjustment problems [2]. These findings underscore the necessity of pedagogical supervision and a balanced approach to gaming.

Positive Impact of Online Games on Social Competence:

Research indicates that multiplayer online games (MMO, MOBA) enhance adolescents' teamwork, role distribution, and strategic thinking skills [6]. In such games, achieving success requires players to communicate with one another, reach agreements, and consider the perspectives of others [4].

Programs for Developing Social Skills:

Adolescents who are excessively engaged in online games often show reduced real-life communication skills. Therefore, the following recommendations are suggested:

- **Team-based training**

- **Role-playing exercises**
- **Conflict resolution workshops**
- **Real-life social programs** (volunteering, group projects)

1. **Family-centered therapy:** Family therapy helps reduce conflicts related to gaming addiction and improves mutual trust between parents and adolescents. The therapy process typically focuses on developing communication skills and identifying issues within family structures.

2. **Metacognitive therapy:** This approach assists individuals in consciously managing their thought processes:

- Monitoring thoughts that trigger the urge to return to gaming
- Developing control mechanisms over these thoughts
- Using a "self-monitoring diary" technique

Online gaming addiction is a multifactorial psychological condition that requires an integrative approach for both prevention and psychocorrection. Digital hygiene, family interventions, school-based prevention programs, and contemporary clinical psychotherapy methods have proven highly effective in reducing the risk of developing gaming addiction and mitigating its negative consequences.

Online Games and the Development of Empathy: Games that incorporate pedagogical and narrative elements can enhance empathic understanding in adolescents. Wegmann noted that digital games can contribute to the development of emotional identification, emotional regulation, and components of empathy [3]. Furthermore, game-based educational programs have been found to be effective tools for fostering empathy and compassion [1].

Negative Aspects of Online Games: At the same time, prolonged exposure to online games with violent content may be associated with a decrease in empathy levels. Research conducted by Song Kuai found that violent online games can lead to reductions in both cognitive and affective empathy [2]. In some cases, this may contribute to an increase in cyberbullying and social conflicts [7].

Online games have a significant impact on the development of social competence and empathy in adolescents. While socially oriented and cooperative games can promote positive psychological development, violent and uncontrolled games may lead to negative outcomes. Therefore, conscious use of online games for educational and developmental purposes is crucial.

The influence of online games on adolescents' social competence and empathy can be both positive and negative: positive effects include the development of collaboration, emotional awareness, and communication skills in multiplayer environments, whereas negative effects are reflected in reduced empathy related to violent games and disengagement from real-life social interactions. A balanced, pedagogically sound approach can help maximize the positive impacts of gaming.

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