LEARNING ABOUT REFUGEE LIFE WITH EDUCATIONAL VIDEO GAMES

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Abstract. In recent years, scholarly investigations have yielded the consensus that video games possess multifaceted attributes that extend beyond their conventional perception as mere sources of leisure, diversion, and entertainment. The immersive nature of video games has led to increased interest in their use as platforms for engaging in discourses across a diverse array of subject matters with the potential to reach a wider audience and generate meaningful impact. Combined with the sense of presence and ownership that allows players to be placed in the shoes of characters grappling with social or political issues, video games are converting into an effective and accessible tool for learning and engagement with pressing cultural, social and political issues. Current research aims to understand better the potential of educational video games to address these pressing problems, in this case, the refugee crisis, to evoke empathy and raise awareness by looking at the problem 'behind the scenes' with an audience that initially was not interested in the topic. This qualitative study (N=78) employed the narrative research method to examine experiential participatory learning with participants playing the educational video game *Against All Odds* developed by UNHCR. By immersing players in this virtual experience, this game was created to educate and encourage a greater understanding of the realities faced by refugees, the complexity, and dangers of the refugee experience, as well as the reasons behind their displacement. The promising results of the research show that a video game can address serious social issues by creating a simplified but still dynamic scale model of refugee reality. Participants reported an enjoyable gaming experience, newfound interest in the issue at hand, increased empathy toward refugees, and motivation to help people in need. The study illustrates that by putting players in the shoes of struggling characters, video games could make learning about these topics more engaging and, as a result, more accessible and appealing to a wider audience, including non-gamers and people previously disinterested in the topic. These results invite educators, researchers, and scholars from the fields of education, game studies, social sciences, and cultural studies to explore the potential of video games as a possible tool for engaging students, addressing social issues, raising awareness, and fostering empathy. The article also identifies several prospective domains for future research.

Keywords: video games; refugee crises; impact of video games; game-based learning; educational technologies; non-formal education.

1. INTRODUCTION

The problem statement. Today, there are 90 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, more than ever in modern history, representing almost 1% of the world's population and is equivalent to the 14th most populous country in the world [1]. These people have been uprooted from their homes and fled extreme dangers and life-threatening circumstances. Displaced people are trying to survive not only the harrowing challenges of migration itself. Harmful deterrence policies are put in place by governments trying to keep out migrants and asylum seekers at all costs. Governments worldwide have expressed concerns about the arrival of ethnic cultures that threaten the welfare state, social and cultural cohesion, the existing political and economic power structure, and employment opportunities that lead to refugee crises in the EU and the US [2]. At the same time, several initiatives have been established to foster a better understanding of refugees and immigrants among local populations. For example, advocacy organisations and NGOs conduct awareness campaigns, social media campaigns, and public events to raise awareness about the contributions and struggles of refugees and immigrants, encouraging local communities to embrace diversity and support integration

efforts. As such, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) launched an initiative to challenge stereotypes about refugees and migrants and start learning about acceptance through video games. This initiative aims to allow children of diverse backgrounds to focus on what makes them similar rather than different in a safe and fun gaming environment [3].

Analysis of recent studies and publications. The immersive nature of video games has led to an increased interest in using them to address serious and sensitive social issues. A wide range of video games have been designed to create empathy by placing players in the shoes of asylum seekers, refugees, and poor or homeless people, demonstrating that the most challenging topics can be contextualised to create meaningful and engaging gaming experiences [4]. These video games foster critical thinking and encourage reflection about what is happening in the world [5]. Thanks to their technological format, video games can construct sophisticated messages that combine social, political, economic, and historical factors of the problem at hand and can reinforce social-activist messages [6]. Many types of video games evoke compassion in players by providing an experience that allows them to deeply examine the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of the character of the game [7]. In video games, players adopt the perspective of another identity (an in-game character) and gain insight into its motivation. It brings players into contact with points of view that they would otherwise never have imagined, allowing them to weigh these views against their own beliefs. In addition to this inward-turning, games also make players look outward at the world through the eyes of the game characters.

This perspective-taking helps players negotiate social complexities, diminishes biases, improves intergroup attitudes, and encourages them to view outgroups as more "self-like" and themselves as more "outgroup-like" [8]. It has been observed that after playing *Darfur Is Dying*, students aged 10 -14 were more willing to help Darfurian people than those who had merely read about the situation in Darfur [9]. Those who played *Homeless: It Is No Game* felt greater sympathy for homeless people [10]. Similarly, playing the *Peacemaker* affected a positive attitude change toward foreign nations [11]. After playing *Poverty Is Not a Game (PING)*, almost a third of those who previously described themselves as 'not interested' in politics considered themselves 'interested' in politics [12]. In the same vein, Tawa [13] described the development of understanding the concepts of race, people of colour experiences, and white privilege in real life after the experiment with white students played the virtual world of *Second Life*. Nijdam [14] examined the interactive fiction *Bury me, my Love* to determine to what extent games on forced migration can be set in dialogue with larger debates on forced migration. Furthermore, *Bury Me, My Love* has shown great potential to influence players, evoke empathy, address the objectives of human rights education, and help reduce prejudice towards refugees [15]. In a similar manner, *Papers, Please* was demonstrated to influence attitudes towards immigration [16]. Due to these results, there are great expectations about the usefulness of video games to bring positive change to society due to their ability to provide a safe-to-fail space, which can drastically impact social processes [17], [18].

The research goal. The current research focusses on the specific context of the use of video games. It seeks to better understand the potential of educational video games to address pressing global problems, in this case, within the realm of refugee-related challenges, to evoke empathy and raise awareness by looking at the problem "behind the scenes" with the audience that initially was not interested in the topic. The present research also aims to expand on previous studies by investigating the effects of video game use on end users.
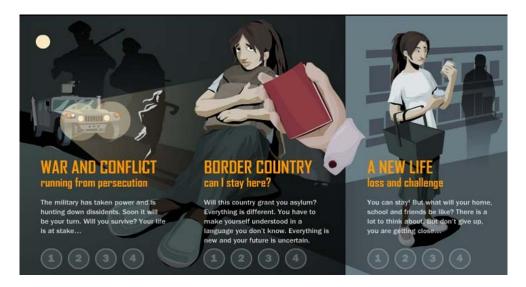
2. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1. Participants

This article presents the findings of a qualitative study that collected narratives from seventy-eight undergraduate students enrolled in a medium-sized university in Kyiv, Ukraine. Potential participants received no advance indication of what the study might be intended to measure; they were simply told that the study was about educational video games. Students volunteered to participate in the study in exchange for additional course credits. One hundred and seven students took part in this research. Due to the study design, thirty respondents were eliminated because their answers did not add value to this research (e.g., incomplete answers, repeated answers, short yes/no answers, etc.). The final sample size was seventy-eight undergraduate students.

To analyse the composition of the study group, basic demographic information was collected, namely sex, age, and previous experience playing video games and with a social or political message. The mean age of the sampled participants was 17.05 years (SD = 0.88). Most students were male (73%), while the rest (27%) were female. The participants were 100% Ukrainian. Furthermore, participants indicated no prior experience with educational video games or games that explicitly address political or social issues. It is worth noting that the participants invited for this study had a primarily academic focus in technology-related fields and had no background in political, social, or cultural sciences. Lastly, looking at the frequency with which the students sampled played computer games, 23% identified themselves as casual players, 52% as gamers, and 25% as non-gamers.

2.2. Stimuli

Against All Odds (UNHCR, 2006) is an approximately 45-minute-long role-playing game developed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to make people more aware of the problems and challenges facing refugees, to change the public's attitude towards refugees by illustrating the complexity and dangers of the refugee experience. It covers the refugee experience, from when people are forced to leave their countries of origin to starting their new life abroad. The players take on the role of a refugee and play through three modules with four stages each (Picture 1). The game's first module takes the player through questioning and persecution and then through the process of fleeing their city and, eventually, their country. The second module takes the player through the asylum request process, and the final module deals with the integration challenges facing the refugee in their new country. In addition to the information that the player gets while playing the game, they can also read the facts on the Web. The game module links to pages with background information about the Geneva Convention and facts on migrants, refugees, and asylum from external sources, such as NGOs. At the end of the game, the player is presented with ways to take action by either donating or spreading the word. The game is a free Adobe Flash video web-based with no special software or hardware required. Moreover, the game was awarded the Austrian State Prize for Multimedia and e-Business. It was praised for '*building understanding, empathy, and concern for the plight of refugees in the player.'* It is available in eleven languages.

Picture 1. Screenshot of the video game entry page.

Researchers have expressed interest in this game. For example, the game was used to study the impact on knowledge about refugees, perspective on learning, immersion, identification willingness to help and feeling of persuasion [18], [19]. Similarly, Sou [20] used the game to discuss procedural rhetoric concerning the problematic decisions and dilemmas facing refugees and to analyse the representational practices of serious games that focus on refugees.

2.3. Design and Procedure

This case-based study employed a narrative research methodology to collect the participants' experiences engaged in gameplay [21]. Narrative research makes it possible to explore the participants' experiences in nuances and interrelationships among aspects of experience and then present the meanings that participants derive from their experiences [21].

Students were given writing prompts in Microsoft Office 365 Forms with instructions to write down notable in-game experiences and observations after starting the game. Students were expected to spend around 45-60 minutes playing the game during one weekend. The participants kept an online reflective journal with prompts to assist them during or after gameplay in their reflections on their engagement, enjoyment, immersion, difficulties, personal reactions, learning outcomes, and links to the real world. To avoid communication barriers, students could choose to answer the questions in either English or Ukrainian.

The participants in the studies were treated with the following ethical standards:
- voluntary informed consent,
- the right to withdraw at any stage,
- privacy (data collected during the research process were treated with confidentiality to protect the privacy of research participants).

2.4. Data Analysis

The data analysis procedure was based on the repeated reading and reflection of the narratives and subjective judgments represented by the self-reports. The data was examined for patterns or repeated ideas that resulted in the data coding system. The responses of each participant were tagged with codes in a spreadsheet. The themes were manually coded on hard-copy prints, following a streamlined codes-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry [22]. The resulting coding themes accounted for the specific context of the selected video game. As stated

previously, this study intended to make players reflect upon their acquisition of new knowledge, changes in attitude brought about by the game, the experience of an event in the game, and linking this gaming experience to their real-life personal reactions combined with emotions and thoughts. Their self-reflections on those reactions cumulatively contributed to six overarching themes that were identified from the data, namely:

– Uncovering the true extent of the refugee crisis.
– Increased cognitive empathy for refugees.
– Increased level of self-awareness.
– Demonstration of willingness to take action in real life.
– Simplicity of linking video game themes with actual world circumstances.
– Impression from the video game.

3. THE RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Uncovering the true extent of the refugee crisis

Extensive research findings indicate that a substantial portion of the population holds significant misperceptions regarding the global migrant population and its composition, and public perceptions concerning the impacts of migration often deviate from actual realities [23]. It is important to note that the current global landscape is marked by the presence of thirty-two active armed conflicts with varying degrees of severity [1]. A noteworthy observation arising from this study is that a considerable number of participants exhibited limited awareness of the extensive scale of the problem prior to engaging with the game:

'Some moments of the game seemed very informative to me, and I could immerse myself in the lives of real refugees.'

'The problem the game highlights, and even the fact of its coverage, is impressive because many of us do not thoroughly imagine the tragedy that is going on in the world.'

An interesting finding from the study is the self-perceived level of knowledge among certain participants, who initially believed themselves to be well-informed about the topic. However, upon further exploration, these individuals came to realise that their understanding of the issue was, in fact, limited:

'I learned more about refugees, and now I realise that I do not know anything about them and their lives.'

'I had not thought that immigrants have such serious problems; now I am convinced that they do have them.'

3.2. Increased cognitive empathy for refugees

The power of video games to engage players' ability to empathise innovatively was discussed by various researchers, demonstrating that these effects may be measurable [15], [24], [25]. Meanwhile, study participants stated that they understood the actual manifestation of stereotypes and prejudices, which confirms the previously reported change in attitudes toward the topics depicted in video games [26], [27].
'While playing the game, I was surprised by people's attitude towards refugees and the stereotypes that these people believe in for some reason.'

Another notable observation is the participants' recognition of prevalent prejudices and stereotypes held by the local in-game population. This realisation came as a surprise to them, highlighting the existence of biases and misconceptions:

'There were moments when it was not comfortable to be in the refugee's place, but I understood that to fight against the new environment would be a mistake, even though discrimination is clearly expressed and very offensive.'

'I was shocked by the number of people who were aggressively opposed to refugees … Almost no one believes me! Such a life is terrible!'

3.3. Increased level of self-awareness

The transgressive nature of the chosen game world and the actions the character has to take for survival serves as a catalyst for self-learning and self-disclosure. Through these experiences, participants are exposed to challenging situations that require them to navigate complex ethical choices. This exposure not only prompts reflection on their decisions in the game but also sparks introspection into their own values, beliefs, and behaviours [26]. As such, several participants in our study were surprised to discover previously unrecognised facets of their own personalities and characteristics:

'Since I did not have the right to make mistakes, I had to think one step ahead. After all, the decisions I made in the present played a role in the future. I happen to be a strategic thinker.'

'I faced the fact that I am very indecisive.'

'I realise that I am very trustful. I like to trust people. But in the game, I found myself in trouble when I believed strangers. I shouldn't have!'

During the course of the gameplay, some participants, upon confronting the challenging moral dilemmas presented, expressed a newfound unwillingness to be involved in the particular type of issue addressed in the video game:
'This game was brutal to me. I understand that the game is based on real-life cases, cases very similar to the situation that people from the east of Ukraine are in now. But I hope I never find myself in such a situation... Also, I was very scared by the scene where the police beat the main character because of his beliefs; it was terrible for me.'

Discussing different aspects of a player's moral engagement in the video game in general and game difficult decisions and dilemmas in video games about refugees, in particular, is an emerging trend in games studies [20], [28]. This study revealed that a significant number of participants encountered complex moral dilemmas that prompted deep contemplation of their real-life behaviour. These thought-provoking scenarios within the game encouraged players to question whether they would respond similarly in actual situations:

'During the interrogation in prison, it was necessary to fill out a questionnaire the way the government wanted. I couldn't pass the level because I told the truth. And then I realised that I had to lie to escape. I hate lying!'

'During the third stage, when it was necessary to choose a new way of life, there was no way that I would want to choose, so I had to make a decision that didn't coincide with who I am.'

'It was hard to choose between my interest and the interests of the whole group. I had to negotiate with myself.'

3.4. Demonstration of willingness to take action in real life

There is evidence that after playing video games that tackle pressing social problems, people were more likely to participate in social and civic movements in their real lives, such as raising money for charity or volunteering [9], [15]. In addition, players report a strong desire to obtain more information about problems, communicate with friends about the issues, or stimulate them to play the game [5]. One essential characteristic of educational video games is their potential to stimulate a proactive mindset, fostering a willingness among players to take action and make meaningful contributions, even if it is only spreading the word among others. *Against All Odds*, in line with this principle, incorporates numerous links to nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) that provide valuable information and actionable ideas for individuals interested in making a difference. Owing to this, a considerable number of participants expressed a desire to become more actively engaged in addressing refugee-related issues, reflecting the game's ability to inspire and motivate individuals to contribute in various ways:

'I began to think about this issue very much. Now I will learn more about this. Immediately after the game, I read a lot of information about it. I want to know how to help these people.'

'Now that I have been in the role of an asylum seeker in a foreign country, even if only virtually, I have become more sympathetic to the fate of forced refugees. I will develop a stronger interest in refugee issues, and if needed, I will find ways to help them.'

3.5. Simplicity of linking video game themes with real-world circumstances

Through the gameplay experience, participants were prompted to consider the intricate connections between the video game, their personal lives, and the broader context of their country. They were encouraged to explore potential solutions to the complex refugee crisis. Interestingly, a prevailing conclusion drawn by many participants was the absence of immediate remedies. Recognising the continuous existence of armed conflicts and life-threatening circumstances, many participants acknowledged that as long as such adversities persist, individuals will continue to seek safety by fleeing perilous environments. Some participants connected the game with the global refugee crisis. Still, the majority linked it to the situation in Ukraine[1], where the military conflict with Russia and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 has caused internal migration processes:

'In our country, there are a lot of refugees from the Donbas who, like in the game, had to overcome difficulties to safely cross the border of the DNR (the self-proclaimed Donetsk National Republic) and enter the peaceful territory controlled by Ukraine.'

'Due to the annexation of Crimea and the tragic situation in the Donbass, our country is forced to help the affected people. Our government has made great efforts to arrange their lives in the central and western parts of Ukraine.'

'There are many interregional refugees in my country due to military actions in the eastern part. People, and sometimes me, are very judgemental about them. But unfortunately, in fact, half of the refugees treat their new environment disrespectfully, thus creating the ground to be treated judgementally.'

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[1] The research was conducted before the full-scale invasion of russia on the territory of Ukraine on 24.02.2022.

3.6. Impression from the game

Most of the participants were gamers or casual gamers who said they were familiar with virtual gaming environments and their effects. Of course, for students used to modern "bells and whistles" games, an educational video game like *Against All Odds* may seem tedious. According to the developers, the game is aimed at teenagers, the age when people begin to develop ideas regarding refugees and similar issues. Some educational video games have a proven history of positively impacting respondents' knowledge and opinions about the political issues addressed in video games [5]. Although many participants admitted that they had never played games of this type, they were surprised by their existence and realism, confirming the results on the effects of educational video games on immersion and feelings of persuasion [18], [19]:

'First of all, it became clear that the world is not perfect, and most problems do not lie on the surface. Creating such games is a way of informing society and encouraging compassion for and understanding of displaced people.'

'Initially, the game did not impress me. But the more I played, the more I was surprised by the essence of the problem it emphasises.'

'While playing Against All Odds, it seemed to me that I was in danger and needed to flee. There was discrimination on the part of the students, on the scene at the school where I was a newcomer. I realised how difficult it is to understand something without knowing the language.'

Furthermore, participants shared profound emotional responses elicited by the game:

I was tense during the game due to the prevailing atmosphere. It was exciting to go through the whole story, though.'

'I felt fear, horror, terrified. This game really worried me. I felt like a refugee, and it felt very creepy.'

'What are emotions? Well, tension, concentration, joy at the right actions, disgust at the negative statements of people unfamiliar with me who, on the other hand, do not know me.'

Lastly, the game evoked introspective and philosophical contemplations among a subset of players, prompting deep reflections on the depicted situations and their broader implications:

'Sometimes I did something wrong, and I would lose. I played again and again. I felt upset because I realised that in real life I would have died immediately.'

During the first stage of the first escape from the city, the police officers discovered me. I felt frustrated and lost because here it was just a game, and I could try again, but in real life, I would not have been alive anymore.'

4. GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

'Video games and refugee crises' might sound like a contradiction in terms. It is hard to imagine someone playing with this serious topic on the grounds that social issues and their solutions have complex parameters to codify and craft. Surprisingly, by creating virtual environments that simulate aspects of reality and introducing players to unfamiliar narratives, video games offer an unprecedented opportunity to raise awareness, foster empathy, and promote a deeper understanding of pressing social issues such as the plight of refugees. Video games offer a unique platform for individuals to engage with complex topics, enabling them to

perceive life from diverse perspectives and delve into the intricacies of refugee experiences. As a result, the transformative potential of video games to provide players with immersive, interactive experiences and facilitate empathetic connections is driving a growing interest of the research community in applying this medium to address pressing social, cultural and political concerns.

The current study followed this trend and invited participants to explore what it was like to be a refugee. It attempted to ascertain whether the immersive, all-embracing and interactive learning environment provided by the educational video game *Against All Odds* helps develop and enhance users' awareness of refugee issues, change their perspective, and drive them to take some form of positive action in real life. The virtual world of *Against All Odds* is constructed around certain viewpoints, expressing specific ideas and offering particular experiences surrounding refugee life. The participants played *Against All Odds* and filled in the reflective learning journal to share information on their engagement, enjoyment, difficulties, reflections on their personal reactions, and learning outcomes. Six promising themes were identified from the data that showed a self-reported increase in knowledge issues addressed in these games and a better understanding of the scale of the problem in the world, development of emotional connections and empathy to the in-game character, and self-learning among individuals who might initially lack interest in the topic. There is a clear demonstration that the educational video game does show extraordinary promise to challenge students' attitudes, show them other realities, help them look beyond entrenched perspectives, and possibly motivate them to be change leaders.

Indeed, research findings support the idea that worldviews are often taken for granted and left unquestioned until they are juxtaposed with other frames of interpretation [29]. Bringing about attitudinal change is difficult, but the figured words of *Against All Odds* challenged players' default perspectives on the world. Players usually use the pronoun 'I' when talking about video games. By using the pronoun 'I,' players emphasize their personal involvement, agency, and identification with the virtual character or avatar they control. This linguistic choice enhances the sense of presence, immersion, and ownership, reinforcing the player's connection to the game's narrative and actions, and resulting in a new level of empathy. Indeed, the study reported that participants found the game experience entertaining, and many ended up feeling more empathy for refugees. This also demonstrates that empathy is a skill—mentally putting oneself in a given situation—and, as such, it can be trained, e.g., with video games that encourage players to create new contexts depending on the game's storyline.

On the whole, findings that video games can challenge players' existing mindsets and attitudes towards the cultural other invite educators to take a closer look at video games and find new applications for them as possible tools in their teaching practice. Video games are powerful tools for creating and communicating common views of a problem. They allow users to try out different possible solutions in a safe environment and to draw their own conclusions about why and how they work. Thus, the player forms core beliefs about the issue. Likewise, games make it emotionally easy for players to, for instance, try different ideologies. In other words, gaining hands-on experience with differing worldviews is one of the things that games allow. Users can safely experiment on their computers. Since the cost of failure in the game is low - players can always restart the game, pass a level again, or try a new strategy- they risk nothing by trying new identities. This low cost of failure is in stark contrast to the real world, where it is socially terrifying to take action. Consequently, those who enjoy playing video games and are accustomed to this medium may find it appropriate to learn about serious social and political topics from the same favourite medium with which they spend hours playing. This could create a precedent for video games to overtake traditional media in their influence on social issues and could also have real-life effects [30].

Regarding willingness to help, if the audience enjoys the game experience and gameplay, this leads to increased interest in learning more about the game's issues and, consequently, actions in real life [5], [9]. A greater understanding of the topic subsequently stimulates action-taking [10]. This qualitative study did reveal that participants reported finding the games' features captivating and later said they were willing to take action in real life. It is worth noting that though the participants proclaimed a willingness to take action in real life and help refugees or change the situation somehow, this was hypothetical. Their actual behaviour may differ. The described observations call for more research. However, people who stated their intention to take action in real life are more likely to actually do it than those who did not indicate such an intention [31].

Limitations of the study and prospects for further research. It should be acknowledged that the overall promising findings of this investigation could be related to the novelty of using this technology to address such pressing issues. The participants in the study had no exposure to educational video games that conveyed explicit political or social messages. To ensure deeper learning, discussion of the game content, the player's background, and prior knowledge alongside guided reflection might also be needed. It is also worth mentioning that student participation was rewarded with additional course credits. As a result, the Hawthorne effect must be considered, where participants might modify their responses to comfort researchers. Because this study included a relatively small number of student participants, the applicability of the findings to other populations is limited. Sampling other population groups and using different settings would enrich further studies on the appropriateness of video games to raise awareness of social and political issues and challenge the worldview through this medium. More than that, the video game used in this study was designed as a simplified but dynamic scale model of a refugee reality. How social and political issues are represented in video games vary widely in terms of genre, gameplay mechanics and tone, making it difficult to make generalisations about the effectiveness of video games as a tool for raising awareness and promoting understanding of social and political issues. Choosing for experiments other types of video games would add to the knowledge of how different approaches to representation influence players' understanding of the issue at hand.

It should be mentioned that, considering the evolving dynamics of migration and forced displacement that the world is experiencing in 2023, several recommendations emerge from the results of the present study. To begin with, fostering greater collaboration among video game producers, educators, and organisations that work on the hardships or dilemmas surrounding forcibly displaced people can develop and implement more targeted and impactful educational video games that specifically address current challenges. This collaboration will ensure that educational video games reflect current contextual realities and accurately represent their perspectives and experiences, and will make it easier to incorporate real-world scenarios, policy dilemmas, and potential solutions within the game narratives. It is equally important to adhere to ethical guidelines in developing and implementing these games, respecting refugees' dignity, privacy, and rights while promoting inclusivity and avoiding perpetuating stereotypes or trivialising their experiences. Furthermore, adopting a multidisciplinary approach can deepen our understanding of the impact of video games on attitudes, behaviour, and social change within the current political and social crises. Therefore, collaboration between fields such as game design, education, psychology, sociology, and cultural studies can shed light on the complex interplay between video games and society. In addition, continuous evaluation and improvement of educational video games is also necessary to ensure their effectiveness. Collecting quantitative and qualitative data to assess the impact of these games on player knowledge, attitudes, and empathy for refugees can help refine the mechanics and narratives of the game. Last but not least, advocating for policy changes and raising awareness of the potential of educational video games among policymakers, educators, and relevant stakeholders

can promote their integration into formal and informal educational settings, fostering empathy, critical thinking, and awareness of the refugee crisis.

In summary, even though video games have long been considered entertainment-focused, the educational use of video games that address global issues is an intriguing topic that the scientific community still needs to reach a consensus on. In the recent decade, there have been a number of studies exploring whether video games have any role in making people live and feel remote situations and negotiate cultural and political spaces as actively engaged citizens. The results of the present qualitative study expand on previous studies and demonstrate that video games could be used to address serious social issues and increase ethical awareness of the refugee crisis, arouse emotions, make people see things from the point of view of refugees, change people's perceptions, make them interested in the topic, and encourage them to take action in real life. Undoubtedly, further research with a multidisciplinary approach is needed to draw more robust and coherent conclusions.

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ВИВЧЕННЯ ЖИТТЯ БІЖЕНЦІВ ЗА ДОПОМОГОЮ ОСВІТНІХ ВІДЕОІГОР

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Анотація. Останніми роками науковці дійшли згоди стосовно того, що відеоігри мають різнобічні характеристики, які виходять за межі їх традиційного сприйняття як простого джерела дозвілля і розваг. Імерсивна природа відеоігор призвела до зростання інтересу до їх використання як платформи для участі в дискусіях на різноманітні теми, що можуть зацікавити широку аудиторію та мати значущий вплив. У поєднанні з відчуттям присутності та співпричетності, що дозволяє гравцям опинитися на місці персонажів, які борються з соціальними чи політичними проблемами, відеоігри перетворюються на ефективний і доступний інструмент для навчання та залучення до вирішення нагальних культурних, соціальних і політичних питань. Нинішнє дослідження має на меті краще зрозуміти потенціал освітніх відеоігор у вирішенні цих нагальних проблем, у даному випадку кризи біженців, викликати емпатію та підвищити обізнаність, розглядаючи проблему "за лаштунками" з аудиторією, яка спочатку не була зацікавлена в цій темі. У цьому якісному дослідженні (N=78) використовувався наративний метод дослідження вивчення експериментального партисипативного навчання з учасниками, які грали в освітню відеогру "Всупереч усьому",

розроблену УВКБ ООН. Ця гра із зануренням гравців у віртуальний досвід була створена з метою навчання кращого розуміння причин переміщення біженців, складнощів та небезпек, з якими вони стикаються. Результати дослідження показують, що відеогра може допомогти вирішити серйозні соціальні проблеми, створюючи спрощену, але все ж динамічну масштабну модель реального життя біженців. Учасники повідомили, що отриманий від гри досвід викликав та посилив інтерес до проблеми, емпатію до біженців та мотивацію допомагати людям, які цього потребують. Дослідження ілюструє, що відеоігри, ставлячи гравців на місце персонажів, які переживають труднощі, можуть викликати більшу зацікавленість до вивчення цих тем, завдяки їх доступності та ігровому компоненту, залучати ширшу аудиторію, долучаючи неігроманів і людей, які раніше не цікавились цією темою. Результати дослідження мають спонукати освітян, дослідників і науковців освітньої галузі, ігрової індустрії, соціальних наук і культурології вивчати потенціал відеоігор як можливого інструменту для залучення учнів до вирішення соціальних проблем, кращого їх розуміння та виховання емпатії. У статті також визначено декілька подальших перспективних напрямів майбутніх досліджень у цій сфері.

Ключові слова: відеоігри; кризи біженців; вплив відеоігор; ігрове навчання; освітні технології; неформальна освіта.