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Playing Both Sides: Qualitative Insights into The Limits of Social Impact Games for Overcoming Conflicts

Dr. Iolie Nicolaidou

Cyprus University of Technology

Abstract

People on both sides of intractable intergroup conflicts hold strong ethnocentric perspectives toward the other side, which are highly resistant to change. Social impact games, such as “Fact Finders”, which focuses on the Cyprus 1974 conflict, were designed to challenge ethnocentric perspectives and encourage players to investigate multiple perspectives in a conflict. The study examines the game’s impact on players’ learning and on their perspectives towards the conflict. Fifty-three (n=53) Cypriot participants of different ages (18-58 years old, M=31.32, SD=12.63), recruited using convenience sampling, played the game and participated in semi-structured interviews. This was the first time the game was evaluated by older participants who experienced the war. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. Participants, especially younger participants, reported learning historical facts (23/53), while others reported improved critical thinking and source evaluation (15/53), and understanding multiple perspectives (9/53). Some participants (7/53) reported no significant learning after playing the game. The majority (45/53) believed that playing the game did not significantly change their pre-existing views of the conflict, while the rest (8/53) reported a slight shift toward a better understanding of the "other side". Even though the game had educational value in providing insights into the perspectives of the "other side", it did not fundamentally change participants’ perspectives of the conflict. This research adds to our understanding of the effects of social impact games on learning and their limitations for breaking ethnocentric barriers, particularly for older generations who experienced the war.

Keywords: Cyprus Conflict; Fact Finder Game; Game-Based Learning; Perspective-Taking; Social Change