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Simulation Game in Quasi-Professional Training of Pre-Service Teachers

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Abstract. The relevance of the study lies in the need to highlight the problem of using simulation games in the quasi-professional training of pre-service teachers, bringing the educational process closer to the teachers' real working conditions. The purpose of this paper is to cover the method of using simulation games and its various techniques in the quasi-professional training of pre-service teachers while studying psychological and pedagogical disciplines and to investigate the attitude and level of motivation of pre-service teachers towards the use of simulation games in training for professional activities. Theoretical methods (analysis, synthesis, comparison) were used to examine the problem in the psychological and pedagogical literature, clarify the nature and features of the process of training pre-service teachers for professional activities using simulation games, as well as empirical methods (questionnaires, observations, expert assessments, self-assessment) which were used to investigate the attitude and level of motivation of pre-service teachers towards the use of simulation games in training for professional activities. This paper article presents the structure of the simulation game and methods of working with the simulation game. The authors describe the advantages and disadvantages of using the simulation game in training of pre-service teachers in higher education. The results of students' survey on the specific features of organising simulation games and increasing their efficiency are presented: students' attitude towards the use of simulation games in the educational process and the degree of activity of pre-service teachers in organising simulation games. The study confirmed that the use of simulation games in the quasi-professional training of pre-service teachers contributes to the effective formation of professional competence of pre-service teachers and forms a positive attitude towards the teaching profession, enhances learning interests and students' interest in future professional activities. The paper shows that most students are interested in simulation games and believe that participation in simulation games has a positive effect not only on learning, mood, and relationships of students, but also plays a considerable role in their professional development. The practical significance of the study is to give examples and recommendations for the use of simulation games while studying psychological and pedagogical disciplines, as well as to outline the subject and social contexts of educational activities of future teachers

Keywords: educational process, psychological and pedagogical disciplines, professional competence, game scenario

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INTRODUCTION

New socio-economic circumstances of pedagogical education call for new ways to modernise pre-service teachers' training. Nowadays, the main tasks are the development of the teacher's active professional position and the functional and technological competencies of prospective teachers.

These tasks are the result of world integration, as well as changes in the mechanism of higher education organisation. Taking charge of their learning, prospective teachers should play an active part in their professional development. Simulation games hold a leading place within constructive

learning approaches which can take pre-service teacher training to a new qualitative level. Such games are used to prepare students for the changes that are likely to occur in educational institutions, as well as to inspire prospective teachers to become innovators themselves.

The success of the organisation of the educational process is determined by the methods of transmitting information to students and motivating them to quasi-professional activities [1]. The current trends in the education system require teachers to provide their students with tools, strategies, methods, and techniques for processing information and ways of engaging in learning which could be implemented in real-life professional activities to form and develop the required competencies. Problem-solving and active teaching methods are becoming increasingly widespread [2]. The main goal of pre-service teacher training is the development of student's personal and professional skills [3]. This concept is carried out through the development of integrated personality traits of prospective teachers and individual educational routes.

Based on a review of relevant scientific literature, educational simulation games are considered an active form of human interaction; specially organised management that incorporates teacher's professional activities; student's active autonomous cognitive activities; a model of the decision-making process; a model of human interaction in goal achieving process; and a conflict scenario modelling. Moreva [4] defines the simulation game in the training of prospective teachers as "a kind of simulation modelling [...] a group exercise that stimulates its participants to find proper solutions in imaginary situations. This is the leading form of quasi-professional activity. It sets the social contexts of future professional activity. It provides an opportunity for skill development, social interaction, value development, stimulates professionally oriented creative thinking, provides professional motivation, and develops the key competencies of prospective teachers".

Several studies have recently been conducted on the simulation of teacher training. M. Angelini [5], V. Riemer and C. Schrader [6], C. Silvia [7], S. Tiwari *et al.* [8] investigated simulation games as a pedagogical model and an innovative approach. The researchers established that the simulation game approach in higher education gave the educational and cognitive activities of students an impulse of creativity, helped develop the gained experience, provide self-immersion, and intensification of educational activities.

M. Ariffin *et al.* [9], S. Gold [10], L. Nadolny and A. Halabi [11], A. Ranchhod *et al.* [12] pointed out the importance and evaluated the effectiveness of simulation games. The researchers showed that simulation games considerably help consolidate and expand the knowledge acquired in theoretical study of academic disciplines.

T. Kikot *et al.* [13], P. Lameris *et al.* [14] studied the features of simulation games. These researchers believe that the simulation game allows prospective professionals to learn the specific features of their future professional activities,

as well as to determine a personal role in the educational process.

R. Cózar-Gutiérrez and J. Sáez-López [15] investigated the use of simulation games in the training of specialists of different spheres. They observed that in the implementation of the simulation game, the interaction of the involved parties appeared constantly. The interaction was realised through dialogue between the participants of the game, which created conditions for their professional, pedagogical, and creative self-expression.

Simulation games as models of professional activities reproduce the system of multi-aspect relations in the professional community. Students gain a better sense of the teacher's duties in the environment of a simulation game in which they take part. Through playing the game, students may take on various professional roles and engage with each another, minding the specific features of their roles. Participation in the game aids in understanding the ethical principles of the profession, as well as gaining expertise in the coordination of goals based on predetermined ideals. Simulation games help prospective teachers predict how their colleagues will respond to certain decisions and disputes and teach the main rules of subordination and dispute resolution.

H. Theelen *et al.* [16] noted that the simulation games used in teacher training contribute to the professional development of teachers by acting as a bridge between teacher training and teaching practice. In their review of classroom simulation games, the researchers emphasised that simulators focus on teaching skills. The teachers' attitude towards the use of simulation games and their expectations were described by Ö Kelleci [17]. M. Verkuyl *et al.* [18] pointed out the advantages of simulation games. For instance, the increasing of students' involvement, interest, and the encouragement of critical thinking.

T. Dalinger *et al.* [19] analysed the teachers' feedback after using simulation games in their practice. The participants suggested that the simulation would be expanded and enriched by enabling teacher candidates from different disciplines and different years to use it. In the study of D. Doğan *et al.* [20] it was stated that simulation games for pre-service teachers were supposed to be more realistic and be connected with teacher's everyday problems.

Considering the advantages and disadvantages of using simulation games in the educational process of higher educational institutions, the following main advantages of the simulation game are singled out: to get emotional satisfaction from learning; to increase interest in the subject, issues, problems; reproduction of the subject content of professional activity; diagnosis and development of students' capabilities; learning in conditions close to real. The disadvantages include the high requirements for the instructor as a game organiser; increasing the workload for teachers and students related to the preparation and development of tasks for the game; frivolous attitude of participants towards the game; the danger of transition from the educational aspect to the competitive one.

The purpose of this study is to cover the method of using simulation games and its various techniques in the quasi-professional training of pre-service teachers while studying psychological and pedagogical disciplines and to investigate the attitude and level of motivation of pre-service teachers towards the use of simulation games in training for professional activities.

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

The simulation game procedure is developed according to the following principles. Firstly, a simulation model is built, i.e., the goals, the subject of the game, the participants, the evaluation system are determined. Then, the game model is developed (its script, rules, and roles). The content of the simulation game should be problematic for each participant to have the opportunity to showcase their independent thinking. The participant of the game receives knowledge from the teacher, both through joint activities and from the communication of all participants. The team solves the problem through discussion.

The principle of game modelling comprises *three components*: group activities, interaction, and duality. The developer of a simulation game distributes roles, powers, considers the interests, methodological and psychological conditions of decision-making. Organising and developing the participants' group activities, the instructor uses certain contradictions in the game. Dialogic communication grows into a discourse, discussion. The simulation game should offer situations where participants act consciously and act as both performers of the game and future professionals. In the game, the instructor can place different accents, either increasing or decreasing the importance of the game, learning, developing professional qualities. The effectiveness of the principle of duality is ensured if the real and conditional components of the game are balanced.

Thus, the simulation model of the game sets the subject context of the specialist in the educational process, and the game model sets the social context. To develop a simulation game, the most common professional situations are chosen, where students must demonstrate their competencies in the field of education.

Simulation game planning involves the coverage of the problem situation, the formation of goals and tasks of the game, the definition of structure, the organisation of teams, clarifying the role of each of the participants, diagnostics of objective circumstances.

For effective interaction of game participants, rules reflecting the reality of pedagogical activity are formulated. The stage of summarising and analysing the decision-making at the end of the simulation game is designed in advance. A simulation game is provided in the form of group work and intergroup discussion. The game analysis involves the analysis of results, self-evaluation, conclusions, generalisations, and recommendations.

During the simulation game, the activity of a secondary school is modelled, such as educational events, specific activities of the teacher (meeting of the methodological

association, pedagogical council, lesson discussion, interview), conditions and circumstances where the event takes place or the activity is carried out (principal's office, staff room, foreign school visit).

The scenario of the simulation game includes the plot of the educational event, the characteristics of the structure, and functions of the simulated processes.

The evaluation system is ensured by the following requirements: maximum proximity of the game to real conditions; creating a psychologically comfortable climate and creative atmosphere; careful development and preparation of educational and methodological materials; clear formulation of goals, conditions, and rules of the game; identification of options for possible solutions to the problem; availability of necessary learning equipment.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study, the following methods were used: 1) theoretical: analysis, comparison, generalisation of information from scientific sources on the research problem – to establish the state of the issue under study, to clarify the conditions of use of simulation games in the context of training pre-service teachers; 2) empirical: pedagogical observation, interviews, surveys, questionnaires, expert evaluation, pedagogical experiment – to create scenarios of the simulation games and to test the effectiveness of the developed method of training pre-service teachers by means of simulation games.

The formative study took place based on the Faculty of Philology and Journalism of Vinnytsia Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi State Pedagogical University in 2019-2020 academic year. The fourth-year students, prospective teachers of Philology, were chosen for experimental work as senior courses allow summarising students' knowledge before starting a professional activity and improving the acquired skills and abilities. The simulation games were used during the study of pedagogical courses of the seventh term.

After the formative study, to determine the student's attitude towards the use of simulation games in the study of pedagogical courses, a survey was provided. To this end, the special questionnaire "Student: a Participant in a Simulation Game or a Passive Observer" was developed and conducted.

It comprised 12 statements that had to be evaluated on a five-point Likert scale. In the instruction of the survey, the students were asked to estimate the degree of their agreement with the survey statements, assessing them on a scale from one to five points (a five-point Likert scale): 5 – means completely true (strongly positive); 4 – means usually true (positive); 3 – means sometimes true (uncertain/neutral); 2 – means not usually true (negative); 1 – means never true (strongly negative).

Participants were 96 pre-service teachers of Philology of the 3-4th year of study of the Faculty of Philology and Journalism of Vinnytsia Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi State Pedagogical University. The respondents were informed about the purpose, objectives, and the structure of the study and

assured that the questionnaire would not affect the assessment of students' proficiency and their surnames would not be used in the study result reports. Participation in the survey was voluntary.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For formative studying of the use of simulation games by pre-service teachers at the tutorials of pedagogical and psychological disciplines, a set of scenarios was designed. For example, while investigating the topic "The Profession of a Teacher in the Modern World" (course "Pedagogy"), students are offered a practical simulation game "I Want to Work in Your School". In this game, everyone can express their understanding of the teacher's mission. The purpose of the game is to practice the skill of expressing individuality in a professional situation. Scenario: a competition has been announced to find teachers with interesting and fruitful ideas; a group of experts considers the essay works "How I became a teacher, why I chose this profession"; there is an interview with the "head teacher" (who am I, what am I interested in, my professional principles, ideas); the candidate's idea presentation; competition of professional skills "My Lesson".

In the simulation game, the route of activity, actions, behaviour, and performance of official duties of the teacher, the student's parent, and the head teacher are developed. For this purpose, the educational situation is thought over and the roles are distributed among students. The roles are often juxtaposed to find a compromise or practice the skill to argue the point. Students without roles can be experts or observers. As an example, the author of this paper presents the simulation game "Complaint" on the topic "A Form Tutor in the System of Educational Work at School" (course "Theory and Methods of Educational Work"). The suggested situation is as follows: a subject teacher complained to a form tutor about their student: "He is rude, does not respect my authority, incites children to disrespect and argue with me. Take action!" Distribution of roles includes school administration, subject teachers, classmates, parents, independent professionals. The main task is to suggest and argue practical options for help.

During the propaedeutic practice, considering the topic "Forms of Study Organisation", students are offered the simulation game "When a Teacher is Interested in Teaching, Then a Student is Interested in Learning", which aims to practice the ability to conduct a lesson based on student's individual qualities. The game is based on the following scenario: participants are invited to conduct a mini-lesson; the expert group gets acquainted with the topic and form of the lesson in advance and recommends, considering an individual style of each "teacher" and the conditions of the lesson; micro groups "provoke" (during the lesson) conflict situations and analyse the pedagogical feasibility of solving these situations by the teacher; in this aspect, group analysis and self-analysis are essential.

"Simulation Theatre" is a method of staging and dramatisation. The main task of "Simulation Theatre" is to master orientation in the pedagogical situations while studying

the discipline "Fundamentals of Pedagogical Skills". The plot of the game is a particular fact, a real situation, which can be described in educational journals or media, is chosen for the game. The task of the students is to think through the image of a certain hero, to characterise their actions, to find the proper strategy of behaviour. For example, the purpose of the simulation game "The Teacher of the Year Contest" is to improve professional skills of analysis and self-analysis of the lesson; to express different opinions in the perception of new forms and methods of teaching; to develop the culture of communication. The following roles are assigned: a young beginner teacher in-service – a participant in the competition, Socrates, a conservative teacher, a head teacher, a conformist. The plot of the game is as follows: a beginner teacher analyses their lesson or extracurricular activity considering the items of self-analysis; Socrates provokes a young teacher, his task is to teach a young teacher to defend their opinion; a conservative teacher – a supporter of old, conventional methods. They are an ardent opponent of novel ideas, and they doubt everything. The head teacher identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the lesson, based on current normative documents in the educational sphere. The conformist quickly adapts to any views, they have no individual opinion.

Discussing the topic "The Role of Assessment", students can play the simulation game "Who is Right?" In this game, the offered roles are as follows: a leader, an initiator, a disputer, an original, a critic, an opponent, one who always agrees and other roles. The acting abilities of the participants and the reliable performance of the role are of great importance. But the main goal of the game is to present the arguments to opinion and position, consider the depth of analysis and setting to find the best solution to the problem. The reflection of the game is mandatory where the participants determine the adequacy of their "roles", assess the appropriateness of the arguments, and conclude on the need to form the teacher's skill to maintain contact with people.

The essence of "Game Design" is to develop projects in game conditions that reproduce reality to the greatest extent possible. It combines individual and group forms of student work. Game design can turn into a real design if the result is a solution to a particular practical issue, and the process itself is transferred to the conditions of the existing educational institution. For instance, "Game Design" is offered at one of the final classes in the course "Pedagogy" in the form of a simulation game "School of Future". The purpose of the game is to actualise the creative imagination of the prospective teacher. The scenario of the game is as follows: a group of confederates is selected to create an author's school of the future; the project clearly identifies and analyses the following components: conceptual ideas, the system of teacher-student relations, content and forms of learning; work in micro groups; defence of the presentation; experts (theorists, parents, students, doctors) perform a thorough analysis and make conclusions.

Processing the results of the student survey allowed elucidating the obtained data. As a positive fact, most of the surveyed pre-service teachers (65.6%) have a positive

attitude towards the use of simulation games in the study of pedagogical courses, considering them “innovative, interesting, lively, creative, increasing student’s activity and motivation to educational activity, helpful in the development of essential professional and pedagogical qualities”. Respondents also expressed their readiness to take an active part in their preparation and implementation of simulation games and expressed a desire to take on leading roles. The rest (34.4%) of respondents expressed a positive passive attitude towards simulation games. In general, they evaluated simulation games “as an urgent requirement for the process of training prospective teachers”. However, this part of students refused to take part actively and play leading roles in simulation games while studying pedagogical courses and were ready to perform only simple tasks. They argue that “they are used to working reproductively, according to a pattern; they are not sure that they will cope, they are afraid to fail”.

The higher results were obtained in the assessment of the importance of the use of simulation games in the quasi-professional training. 87.5% of respondents expressed the opinion that the qualities (creativity, artistry, reflexivity, ability to improvise, etc.) necessary to work with children cannot be developed by prospective teachers in the conditions of conventional education, performing reproductive tasks. According to them, “simulation games and other interactive teaching methods contribute to the individual development of the prospective teacher’s personality; allow them to become not only knowledgeable but also a competent professional”.

Answering the next question, in which it was necessary to evaluate simulation games, to show their importance in professional training, not all respondents could properly reveal their potential. Many students associated simulation games with childhood and entertainment (17.7%); a new and complex type of activity (24.0%); training basis for the development of pedagogical skills (38.5%); innovation and creativity (19.8%).

A more realistic assessment of the students’ position in organising simulation games was obtained through an analysis of answers to the next question of the questionnaire. Determining the degree of activity during the organisation of the game, pre-service teachers expressed a desire to play the main roles – 9.4%; create a scenario, plan directions, coordinate the actions of game participants – 11.5%; take part in the game at all stages of its organisation, perform all tasks for successful game implementation – 12.5%. The author of this paper believes that these students, despite some differences in answers, have a positive and active attitude towards simulation games and assumes that in their organisation they will show an elevated level of subjectivity. Summarising the received answers, comparing them with the results of answers to the first question of the questionnaire, the author of this paper obtained a lower result of the positive and active position of prospective teachers to simulation games. Only 33.4% of responded students were ready to take part in simulation games as active participants.

Accordingly, the author of the study attributed more students (55.2%) to a positive-passive position, as they

preferred to perform “technical work” (preparation of the premises, production of attributes and visual aids, computer software, etc.). A group of students was also identified (11.4%) who did not want to take part in the simulation games at all, but to be a “support group”, “spectators”, or to become its members at the request of the instructor.

Due to the students’ answers, the use of simulation games in the training of pre-service teachers helps:

- teach students to form their opinion, express it correctly, prove their opinion, argue and discuss, respect alternative opinions;
- build constructive relationships in the team; seek compromises, strive for dialogue;
- analyse a wide range of opinions, be creative in solving problems;
- implement the idea of cooperation in the educational process, improve the psychological microclimate, create a friendly atmosphere; make the educational process in higher education institutions more democratic.

Thus, the results of the questionnaire, analysis of the answers of pre-service teachers generally showed their elevated level of motivation to take part in simulation games and, accordingly, the need to use this active method in training of pre-service teachers for working with schoolchildren.

The obtained results of this study are proved by the research of other scholars. For example, T. Dalinger *et al.* [19] stated that most of the teacher candidates taking part in their study did not always have the chance to experience teaching in real life and therefore perceived simulations as a source of authentic application. M. Verkuyl *et al.* [18] pointed out that simulation games influenced not only the academic achievements of pre-service teachers but increased the students’ interest and encouraged critical thinking. D. Doğan *et al.* [20] proved that simulators enhanced teachers’ motivation for further professional activities. Thus, researchers who engaged in the empirical study on the effectiveness of simulation games as an interactive method of learning determined the pedagogical possibilities of using simulation games to improve the process of training future professionals. These pedagogical possibilities were proved by this study as well and included the development of motivational orientation of students, creativity, critical thinking, personality traits, practical application of professional skills and abilities necessary for the effective implementation of professional activities.

Prospective teachers expressed their opinion on the specific features of the organisation of simulation games and how to increase their efficiency. Processing, analysis, and generalisation of answers allowed making conclusions and giving recommendations as follows:

- to conduct simulation games more often in practical classes;
- to set tasks and distribute responsibilities clearly;
- to give more time to prepare;
- to involve students in work at all stages of the organisation of simulation games;
- to use simulation games not only in practical classes but also during exams and tests;

- to involve schoolchildren, teachers in-service, parents in preparation and carrying out of simulation games;
- to stimulate and additionally evaluate the creativity, originality, and improvisation of students at different stages of the game;
- to pay special attention to reflection at the end of the simulation game.

As the size of the sample is rather small ($n=96$) and participants were from one Ukrainian university, the study results cannot be generalised as the sample selected cannot exemplify the entire population at large and participants do not represent different universities. This study should be considered as an exploratory investigation that aims to identify possible issues and trends for further research.

CONCLUSIONS

The method of simulation game in quasi-professional training of pre-service teachers is described as a certain sequence of actions of the instructor on the selection of material, development, preparation of game, involvement of applicants in the game activity, the performance of game, and control of the game situation. The use of simulation game is a complex process of simultaneous application of pedagogical knowledge to increase the efficiency of the educational process. The simulation game is a modelling of quasi-professional activity, and

therefore it should include new and progressive trends that arise in the in-service teacher activity.

The developed and implemented scenarios of simulation games created conditions for further improvement of professionally significant competencies of pre-service teachers, providing them with experience of individual and group creative activities. The involvement of students in the organisation and conduct of simulation games in various sections of the pedagogical courses contributed to the development of theoretical knowledge, improvement of practical skills and experience of simulation game organisation, awareness of their importance for the professional development of prospective teachers.

The direct involvement of students in simulation games contributed to the development of key skills that ensure the effectiveness of pedagogical activities. The use of simulation games in the educational process contributes to the development of a positive attitude towards the teaching profession, the activation of educational and professional interests, and the growth of students' interest in future professional activities. The study shows that most students are interested in simulation games and believe that direct involvement in simulation games has a positive effect not only on learning, mood, and relationships between students, but also plays a considerable role in their motivation and professional development.

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Імітаційна гра в квазіпрофесійній підготовці майбутніх учителів

Анотація. Актуальність дослідження полягає в необхідності висвітлення проблеми застосування імітаційних ігор в квазіпрофесійній підготовці майбутніх вчителів, які наближають навчальний процес до реальних умов роботи вчителя. Метою статті є розкриття методики і прийомів використання імітаційних ігор у квазіпрофесійній підготовці майбутніх вчителів під час вивчення психолого-педагогічних дисциплін і визначення ставлення та рівня мотивації майбутніх вчителів до використання імітаційної гри в підготовці до професійної діяльності. У роботі використано теоретичні методи (аналіз, синтез, порівняння) для вивчення проблеми в психолого-педагогічній літературі, уточнення сутності й особливостей процесу підготовки майбутніх учителів до професійної діяльності з використанням імітаційної гри, а також емпіричні методи (анкетування, спостереження, метод експертних оцінок, самооцінювання), які застосовувалися з метою вивчення ставлення і рівня мотивації майбутніх учителів до використання імітаційних ігор у процесі підготовки до професійної діяльності. У статті розкрито структуру імітаційної гри і представлено прийоми роботи з нею. Було охарактеризовано переваги і недоліки використання імітаційної гри у процесі підготовки майбутніх учителів у закладі вищої освіти. Подано результати анкетування студентів щодо особливостей організації імітаційних ігор та підвищення їхньої ефективності в освітньому процесі: представлено ставлення студентів до використання імітаційних ігор в освітньому процесі й визначено ступінь активності майбутніх учителів під час організації імітаційної гри. В результаті проведеного дослідження підтверджено, що використання імітаційних ігор в квазіпрофесійній підготовці майбутніх учителів сприяє ефективному формуванню професійної компетентності майбутніх учителів і формує позитивне ставлення до професії вчителя, сприяє активізації навчально-професійних інтересів і зростанню зацікавленості студентів майбутньою професійною діяльністю. Проведене дослідження свідчить про те, що більшість студентів виявляють інтерес до імітаційних ігор і вважають, що участь у імітаційних іграх позитивно впливає не тільки на процес навчання, настрій та стосунки між студентами, а й відіграє суттєву роль у їх професійному становленні. Практичне значення статті полягає у наведенні прикладів і рекомендацій щодо використання імітаційних ігор на заняттях з психолого-педагогічних дисциплін, у яких окреслено предметний і соціальний контексти освітньої діяльності майбутніх учителів

Ключові слова: освітній процес, психолого-педагогічні дисципліни, професійна компетентність, сценарій гри
