DEVELOPING DIGITAL WELL-BEING AMONG SCHOOL STUDENTS AS A WAY TO PREVENT INTERNET ADDICTION

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Abstract. The rapid expansion of digital technologies has significantly changed the educational and social environment of school students. Although the Internet provides important opportunities for learning and communication, uncontrolled use may lead to problematic Internet use, reduced academic engagement, sleep disturbances and difficulties in self-regulation. This thesis examines digital well-being as a preventive approach to Internet addiction among school students. Digital well-being is considered as the ability to use digital technologies consciously, safely and purposefully while maintaining psychological, social and physical balance. The study emphasizes the importance of developing self-regulation, digital literacy, emotional regulation and healthy daily routines. School-based preventive activities involving students, teachers and parents can contribute to the formation of responsible digital behaviour and reduce the risks associated with excessive Internet use.

Keywords: digital well-being, Internet addiction, problematic Internet use, school students, self-regulation, digital literacy, prevention.

Introduction. Digital technologies have become an essential part of students' everyday lives. Smartphones, social networks, online games and digital learning platforms provide significant educational and communication opportunities. At the same time, excessive and uncontrolled Internet use has become an important psychological and educational concern.

It is important to distinguish frequent Internet use from problematic use. The main indicator of a problem is not only the amount of time spent online, but also **loss**

of control and negative consequences for studying, sleep, family relationships, physical activity and emotional well-being. Therefore, prevention should focus not simply on limiting Internet access, but on developing students' ability to regulate their digital behaviour.

Main part

One of the promising approaches to prevention is the development of **digital well-being**. It includes conscious technology use, self-control, digital literacy, emotional regulation, time management and maintaining a balance between online and offline activities.

For school students, digital well-being can be developed through several practical directions:

1. **Digital literacy** – teaching students about online risks, cyberbullying, misinformation, privacy and persuasive mechanisms of social media.
2. **Self-regulation** – helping students set personal limits, control notifications and avoid automatic or purposeless Internet use.
3. **Emotional regulation** – teaching alternative ways of coping with boredom, stress, loneliness and frustration instead of using the Internet as an emotional escape.
4. **Healthy daily routines** – maintaining adequate sleep, physical activity, academic responsibilities and face-to-face communication.
5. **Family and school cooperation** – establishing consistent and supportive approaches to digital behaviour rather than relying only on punishment or prohibition.

Recent evidence supports the effectiveness of school-based preventive interventions. A 2025 systematic review and meta-analysis found that such interventions can significantly reduce problematic digital technology use among children and adolescents. Importantly, the effect was stronger for **problematic use** than for simple reduction in total screen time. This suggests that prevention should

target the quality and psychological regulation of digital behaviour rather than screen time alone.

A practical school-based programme may include several short activities: assessment of students' digital habits, identification of personal Internet-use triggers, self-regulation exercises, discussions about sleep and digital devices, emotional regulation training and development of an individual **"Digital Well-being Plan."**

The central preventive mechanism can be represented as:

Digital literacy → Self-awareness → Self-regulation → Healthy digital habits → Digital well-being → Reduced risk of Internet addiction

Thus, the student should not be viewed only as an object of external control. The main objective is to develop the student's ability to independently recognize risky digital behaviour and regulate it.

Conclusion

The prevention of Internet addiction among school students requires a comprehensive psychological and educational approach. Restricting Internet access alone cannot provide a sustainable solution. Developing digital well-being, particularly self-regulation, emotional competence, digital literacy and healthy daily routines, provides a more constructive preventive strategy. Schools and families should therefore work together to create an environment in which students learn not to avoid digital technologies, but to use them consciously, safely and purposefully.

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