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## Play activities as a means of developing foreign language skills

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**Abstract.** In the conditions of developing a multicultural interactive society, the importance of learning languages is increasing. Currently, the world educational regulations and guidelines are directed at creating an appropriate environment for maintaining the polylingual community. One of the most effective methods of teaching a foreign (English) language in this context is a play activity, which has a wide potential through a wide range of its functions. Play activities perform information, motivation, simulation, integration, development and other functions, while contributing to the achievement of the global learning goal. The functional potential of game activity allows referring it to as a means of multimodal discourse. Multimodal modal discourse features the opportunity to combine several ways (verbal, visual, kinetic modes) of raising awareness of the world and communication in the process of cognition and interaction. Play activities contribute to memorizing information in a rather spontaneous way due to experiencing emotions, visualization, etc. They allow making teaching methods diverse, providing visual or visual-auditory support in the process of introducing, learning and consolidating lexical, phonetic and grammatical materials; games are effectively and frequently used to conduct classes to revise and systemize materials. Play activities allow students to show and demonstrate their personality traits, as well as their knowledge and skills; they stimulate the achievement of the goal and awareness of the way of achieving this goal. The practical relevance of this research is to develop an original educational board game to align learning with playing when developing foreign language skills.

**Keywords:** multicultural communication, polylingual educational space, foreign language skills, intercultural competence, play activities

## Игровая деятельность как средство развития иноязычной языковой компетенции

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**Аннотация.** В условиях развития поликультурного интерактивного общества возрастает значимость изучения языков. Мировое образовательное сообщество на современном этапе озабочено созданием условий для развития полилингвального сообщества. Одним из наиболее эффективных методов обучения иностранному (английскому) языку в этом контексте является игровая деятельность, которая обладает широким потенциалом, реализует информационную, мотивационную, моделирующую, интегративную, иллюстративную, развивающую, воспитательную функции и вносит вклад в достижение глобальной цели обучения. Функционал игровой деятельности позволяет рассматривать её в качестве инструмента полимодального дискурса, суть которого состоит в особенностях, позволяющих совмещать в процессе познания и коммуникации несколько способов (модусов) освоения мира и общения – вербальный, визуальный, кинетический. Игры способствуют произвольному запоминанию материала, сопряженному с эмоциональным переживанием; позволяют разнообразить приёмы обучения через создание зрительной или зрительно-слуховой опоры в процессе презентации нового лексического, фонетического и грамматического материала; используются в целях более эффективной организации систематического повторения изученного материала. Игра позволяет каждому обучающемуся проявить себя, показать свои знания и умения. Игра стимулирует достижение цели и осознание пути достижения этой цели. Практическая значимость данного исследования заключается в разработке авторской настольной игры для развития иноязычной языковой компетенции.

**Ключевые слова:** межкультурная коммуникация, полилингвальное образовательное пространство, иноязычная языковая компетенция, межкультурная компетенция, игровая деятельность

The sphere of education holds its significant place and has an influence upon all the life processes that take place both locally and at the

global level. Consequently, methodology as a science cannot but develop being in a permanent state of search for the perfect form of

learning/teaching. First of all, it is determined by the fact that methodology is a «technology», a set of forms, methods of professional and creative activity of the teacher. The key task of the educational system is to reveal the potential of all participants in the pedagogical process, to provide them with the opportunity to show their creative abilities. Tackling these problems is impossible without the variability of educational processes. As a result, there appear various innovative techniques. Besides, traditional methods are upgraded consistently.

Currently, reforms and changes in this area are particularly noticeable in the context of developing multicultural interactive society, where the importance of learning languages is increasing due to both the expansion of international economic and industrial relations, and the concept of academic mobility. The factors require conditions for developing intercultural competence contributing to effective communication [1, 2]. Hence, learning foreign languages is considered as one of the priority directions to modernize education.

Modern integration processes make foreign language proficiency personally significant. Students' awareness of the demand for foreign languages in the modern world, its role in the labour market contributes to increasing the motivation.

The modern process of teaching a foreign language implies student-oriented approaches. The learning process should activate the intellectual abilities, knowledge and speech experience, emotions when taking into account personal qualities. Therefore, it is important to design the learning process in such a way for the student to solve certain communicative tasks and have the opportunity to realize their own intentions.

Among the other methods, it is the play activity that is one of the most effective ways of teaching a foreign language to let both teachers and students implement their creative potential. The play activity is a source of positive emotions prerequisite for learning-a-foreign-language process. Games are, first of all, an enjoyable activity. A sense of equality, enthusiasm, feasibility have a beneficial effect on academic performance [3, 4]. The use of the game can serve different purposes. Employing games in foreign language classes is always relevant.

Due to play activities, all the cognitive processes such as thinking, attention, memory acquisition, and creative abilities are developed. Research shows that the structure of motivation

is determined by external factors. There are «personal-specific motives» [5], for example, negative motives when anticipating and trying to avoid the problems for not succeeding academically, etc. But the core of interest is internal communicative and cognitive motives determined by the activity students are engaged in in foreign language classes. Therefore, the teacher should not forget about both game and competition forms of work when introducing and/or consolidating the material.

The influence of educational games on the quality of learning various aspects of a foreign language (communicative skills, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, etc.) has always been attractive from both practical and theoretical points of view [6]. Educational play activities are considered to be a situational-alternative exercise, where it is possible to revise a speech sample in the conditions as close to real communication context as possible covering emotionality, spontaneity, purposefulness of speech utterance [7].

There are different classifications of games. Play activities can be divided into vocabulary games, grammar games, phonetic games, spelling games, creative games, etc. The objective of vocabulary games is for students to enlarge and learn vocabulary in close-to-real-life-situations; learn collocation aspects, etc. The grammar-games goal is to understand speech patterns containing certain grammatical difficulties; to create a natural situation for the use of various speech patterns. Phonetic games are aimed at improving phonetic skills. Creative games contribute to holistically developing foreign language skills.

Game techniques are diverse. There are outdoor games, competition games, ball games (question-answer, translation of words and sentences from Russian into English and vice versa); board games (dominoes, lotto, drawing). Moreover, educational board games, for example, are directed at developing team building skills [8, 9].

Recently, the focus of attention among those available sophisticated learning methods is awarded to multimodal discourse. Multimodal discourse [6] allows combining several ways (modes) of developing foreign language communicative competence – verbal, visual, kinetic ones. Hypothetically, play activities (games) can be referred to multimodal methods. Consequently, they can fulfil the following functions: 1) information: the game is a source of information; 2) motivation: students are emotionally

engaged and interested; 3) simulation: games allow modelling a variety of situations; 4) integration: games can both integrate several mini-games aimed at various aspects of the language, and reflect the phenomena and processes of the surrounding reality; 5) illustration: visual support; 6) development: games develop memory mechanisms, attention, thinking, etc., as well as personal qualities [10].

The practical relevance of this research is to develop an original educational board game. Traditional techniques of learning English can be too monotonous. So, the board game is supposed to align learning with playing. The process of creating the original board game went through several stages.

**Stage I. Conducting a survey.**

A survey among students, schoolchildren and working adults was conducted to evaluate the demand for educational board games. The survey was conducted through the social networks Instagram and V Kontakte. The target audience – 66 people – answered the survey questions in the Google forms format. The most numerous group – 78,8 % were students (from 18 to 22 years old); the second most numerous group – 12,1 % – working adults (from 22 years old and older); schoolchildren (up to 15 years old) were the least numerous.

The respondents were offered to answer the following questions:

- 1) How old are you?
- 2) What is your occupation?
- 3) How long have you been studying English?
- 4) Are you improving your English?
- 5) What methods do you employ to learn English?
- 6) How often do you improve your English?
- 7) How much time per day are you willing to devote to learning English?

8) Have you ever heard about learning English with board games?

9) Have you ever played board games for developing English?

10) What is your attitude to board games as a means of learning English?

11) Would you prefer to use board games to learn English?

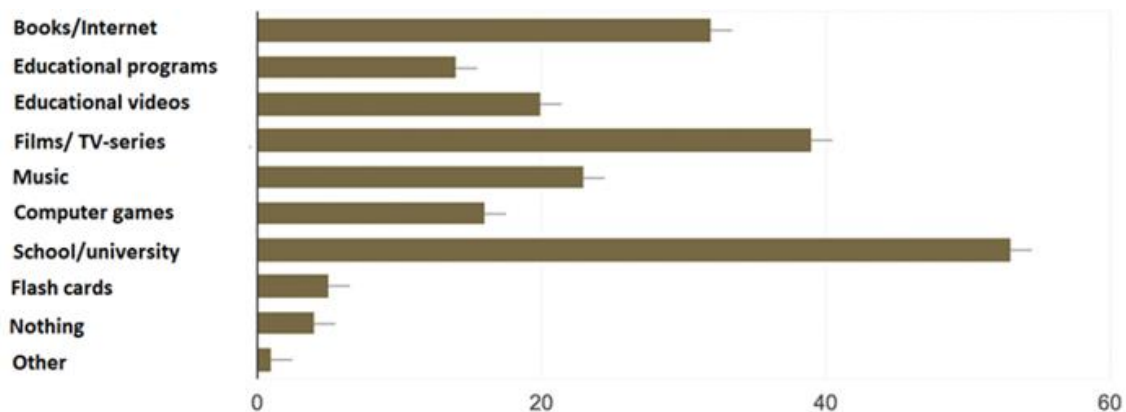
12) What do you think are advantages and disadvantages of educational board games?

13) Would you buy a board game to learn English?

**Stage II. Analysis of the survey results.**

The responses allowed us to find out the level of the respondents' English, as well as what they do to improve it and what ways they learn the language. According to the answers, English is spoken at a very good or average level in each age/occupation group of respondents. And only 3–10 % of all respondents do not know it at all, or do not know the language well. Almost 50 % improve their English language frequently, and as many as 30 % do it on a daily basis. Only 2 respondents do not improve the language and do not want to do it.

So, in the first section of the questions, we found out the minimum information about the respondents' English language level. In the second section of the survey, we found out what methods most people preferred to learn English. More than 50 % of the respondents learn the language in a traditional way (at school/university or with a tutor). From 30 to 40 % learn the language through self-teaching textbooks, or through the Internet, or watching TV shows. It is also quite popular among the respondents to study with the help of training courses, videos, or through listening to songs (Fig.).



What methods do you employ to learn/improve English?

It turned out that exactly 60 % of the respondents had never heard of learning through board games. This area has not been sufficiently developed, at least in Russia. Therefore, it is easier to find a niche in the market. The vast majority of the respondents have never played educational board games, but would like to try it. For 53 % of respondents the idea of the educational board game is appealing, so they said that they would buy it. The remaining 43 % hesitate to answer and 2 people answered they would refuse to buy it. 50 respondents, almost 76 %, consider visual component to be of greater significance. The survey revealed that it is important that the game should develop other skills besides foreign language ones. More than 50 % of respondents hate the idea of playing boring games. It was also important for the respondents that the game could be played both individually and in a team. As for instructions, the opinions were different with the 50 % – 50 % opposition (50 % voted for simple instructions and 50 % voted for more sophisticated ones).

### **Stage III. Developing the game criteria/instructions.**

The survey facilitated the development of the game criteria and instructions. The responses regarding, for example, how, how often, and how much time the respondents spend on learning English (twice a week or daily, up to 1 hour or up to 2 hours) helped us calculate the optimal time for the board game. Therefore, the optimal time of the game process, taking into account the plot, should be no more than an hour and a half, so that the participants can have fun while gaining knowledge.

Thus, the results of the survey assisted in envisioning all the game criteria and guidelines:

- the mechanics of the game should be simple and clear;
- the instructions of the game should not be complicated;

- the game should be aimed at both foreign language skills and team management skills;
- the game should be designed both for an individual player and teams;
- the game should be flexible so as not to be boring regardless of the number of tutorials;
- the game should require ingenuity, background knowledge and attention concentration;
- the game should be visually attractive.

### **Stage IV. Test run.**

The development of the board game was a problem-shooting and time-consuming process, as it required that many details should be taken into account. The mechanics of our game is based on the principle of playing «Monopoly», but with a specific game plot expanded through adding versatile game situations, mini-games aimed at learning the English language.

We created a test sample provided with a unique bright cartoon-like design, invited the maximum number of players of different ages for the test-drive to find out and correct any errors, as well as for calculating the optimal playing time and the minimum age of the players, etc.

Thus, the practical relevance of the research consists in developing the original educational board game appropriate both for improving foreign language and team-building skills. The game helps think in a strategic way and analyse the context holistically. The research results also in the conclusion that students are accustomed to traditional teaching methods, but they are impatient to employ alternative innovative techniques. The board game is beneficial in comparison to traditional ways of learning, especially in terms of motivation. The prospects of this research can be in applying other multimodal tools to perfect the English language, for example, through creating a game with the plot of a film.

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