

## Play activities as a means of adaptation to multicultural academic environment

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**Abstract.** In the conditions of developing a multicultural interactive society, including the educational sphere, there is an increasing need to create tools that facilitate quick and non-traumatic adaptation to the peculiarities of cultures and mentalities of representatives of different countries locating in a single academic environment. The world educational regulations and guidelines at this stage of existence directs its development vector towards the creation of a multicultural community capable of coexisting peacefully, sharing the experience gained in their native countries and common achieving the prosperity of humankind. One of the first methods of cognition available to a person from a young age is a game activity that performs a number of various functions that contribute not only to effective, but also to the exciting study of new material. The functionality of a game activity is not limited to the development of the surrounding world; it also includes the process of communication between game participants, which allows establishing the first emotional contact, which will become the basis for building further relationships. Cultural integration is the basis of the worldwide process of globalization and is undeniably important for the further development of humanity. The flow of this process in a playful way makes it easier and more enjoyable. Thus, the practical relevance of this research is to develop an original board game aimed to simplify the process of adaptation to a multicultural academic environment.

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

## Игровая деятельность как средство адаптации к поликультурной академической среде

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**Аннотация.** В условиях развития поликультурного интерактивного общества, в том числе и в образовательной сфере, возрастает необходимость в создании инструментов, способствующих быстрой и не травмирующей адаптации к особенностям культур и менталитетов представителей разных стран, пребывающих в единой академической среде. Мировое образовательное сообщество на данном этапе существования направляет свой вектор развития на создание мультикультурного сообщества, способного мирно сосуществовать, делиться приобретенным в родных странах опытом и общими усилиями достигнуть процветания человечества. Одним из первых методов познания, доступных человеку с юного возраста, является игровая деятельность, выполняющая ряд разнообразных функций, способствующих не только эффективному, но и увлекательному изучению нового материала. Функционал игровой деятельности не ограничивается лишь освоением окружающего мира, он также включает в себя процесс коммуникации между участниками игры, что позволяет наладить первый эмоциональный контакт, который станет основой построения дальнейших взаимоотношений. Культурная интеграция является основой Всемирного процесса глобализации и неоспоримо важна для дальнейшего развития человечества. Протекание данного процесса в игровой форме делает его более легким и приятным. Таким образом практическая значимость данного исследования заключается в разработке авторской настольной игры для упрощения процесса адаптации к поликультурной академической среде.

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

Learning is the most important process for socializing, as well as understanding and constructing one's identity. At the moment, academic mobility is a dominant trend in higher education. It implies both studying at a foreign university for one or two semesters and obtaining a degree abroad. Of course, participation in such

programs requires that students should speak foreign languages, at least English and the language of the alma mater country. The main goal of mobility is to provide students with the opportunity to get an education in the chosen field of study, to provide them with the access to recognized knowledge centres, where leading scien-

tific schools are formed, to develop knowledge in various fields of culture. As a result of this, students have the opportunity to choose an individual educational trajectory, to obtain better educational services; new conditions for effective competition and interaction are being formed for universities; prospects for fruitful scientific and educational cooperation open up for scientists and teachers; the labour market becomes international and it subsequently facilitates the employment of qualified personnel [1].

Precisely because of the existence of this phenomenon in modern student life it became necessary to find ways to adapt to new learning conditions. Sociocultural (or intercultural) adaptation is a process for students to comply with a new cultural environment, as well as with the result of this process. Usually, the internal side of adaptation is distinguished, which is expressed in a sense of satisfaction and fullness of life, and its external side, which is manifested in the participation of the individual in the social and cultural life of the new group [2]. Adaptation is necessary both for foreign students, who have to join a new team, with a quite different worldview, mentality, their own cultural characteristics, as well as to learn how to live in a foreign country, understand and respect its traditions; and for students of the host university, for whom it is also certainly important to plunge into culture of their guests, to give them a hospitable and friendly welcome. Moreover, students share the language barrier. Even in the conditions of using one language, for example, English, there may be difficulties associated, first of all, with the fear of communicating in a non-native language. All this can adversely affect educational processes, and therefore, there is a need for promoting quick and painless adaptation to a multicultural academic environment.

Play activities could be a great support to solve this problem, as they exercise a number of functions to meet the challenges of a competitive learning process and make it easier. They include teaching, educational, entertaining, communicative, relaxation, psychological and developmental functions. The entertaining, communicative, relaxation and psychological nature of games plays an important role to sustain the adaptation process. Game activities involve various forms of organization of the edu-

cational process: individual, frontal, pair and group ones. These forms of organization of educational activities contribute to developing students' communication and discussion skills, dialogization of educational processes [3]. Play activities are of great importance at the first stages of students' adaptation to a multicultural academic environment. Students who have found themselves in a foreign country without relatives and close people should not isolate themselves from the social environment (establishing new contacts), otherwise there is a high risk of falling into depression or feeling homesick. Avoiding new contacts in a foreign university environment is sure to adversely affect learning processes. Host country students are also responsible for facilitating communication with their foreign peers through being friendly and tolerant.

In general, a multi-ethnic learning environment is inevitable nowadays. The fact promotes the idea that people should be capable of communicating effectively when sustaining one's linguistic and cultural, while being tolerant to other cultures. This approach guarantees discursive practices to live in peace and harmony with representatives of different nationalities [4,5].

Baikal School of BRICS (BS BRICS) provides such a multicultural academic environment where adaptation games enhance students' adjustment contributing to easier adaptation. The game we developed is both entertaining and educational. As mentioned above, playing activity is capable of performing many different functions useful for the learning process [6,7].

The empirical part of the research is represented through the practice-oriented game where students learn new and appealing facts about the countries – members of the BRICS organization. Of course, there is some information about the organization itself. While obtaining this knowledge through the game students make sense of the atmosphere of Baikal School of BRICS as an educational institution, learn to differentiate and tolerate characteristics of students belonging to different countries and cultures. Therefore, gaining new knowledge about each other and various cultures is aligned with communicating in a team in a comfortable and informal environment [8,9]. The game is al-

so aimed at developing subsidiary skills, as it helps to improve students' memory capability. It has a positive effect on the learning process.

The practical relevance of this research is to develop an original board game to make the process of adaptation to a multicultural academic environment easier. Traditional techniques of getting acquainted with each other and each other's cultures may be boring and non-effective for students [10]. So, the board game is supposed to bring a friendly atmosphere in the academic environment and help people of different cultural backgrounds to better understand each other. The game teaches students to get along with each other to become a well-orchestrated team.

The process of working out the original board game went through several stages.

### Stage I. Conducting a survey

A survey among students, schoolchildren and working adults was conducted to analyse how well people are informed about the BRICS organization, as well as to evaluate the demand for developing the BS BRICS memo board game. The survey was conducted through the social network V Kontakte. The target audience – slightly less than 30 people – answered the survey questions in the Google forms format. Mostly, students and employees of our university took part in the survey.

The respondents were offered to answer the following questions:

- 1) Have you ever heard about the BRICS?
- 2) Can you enumerate the member states of this organization?
- 3) Why do you think the organization was created?

4) Would you like to get to know more about the activities of the BRICS organization?

5) Would you like to make this (obtain the information) in a playful way?

6) Would you like to learn something new with the help of an educational game?

7) How often do you play board games?

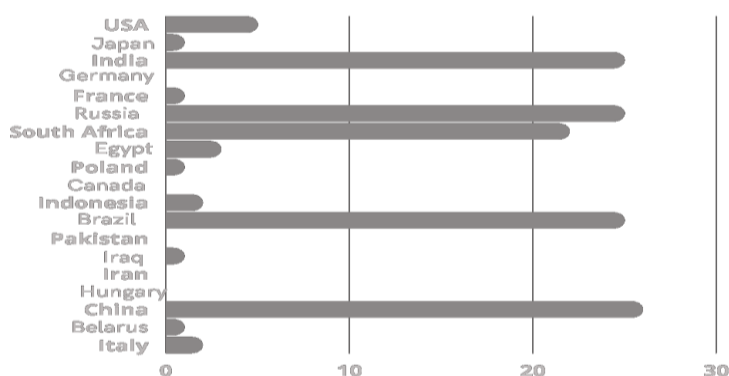
### Stage II. Analysis of the survey results

The respondents' answers allowed us to evaluate the level of awareness about the BRICS organization among the target audience. According to the responses, about 96 % of the respondents are familiar with the organization and its member states. However, 3 % of the respondents believe that the United States and Egypt are also the members of the organization, and about 1 % of the interviewees refer Japan, France, Poland, Indonesia, Iraq, Belarus and Italy to the organization.

So, at the initial stage of the survey, we found out the minimum data on the level of respondents' being aware of the organization itself. Secondly, we found out which countries, according to the respondents, are member states of the BRICS organization.

As a result of further research, we found out how many respondents are aware of the goals to establish the organization. Among the responses received, the most popular were the following:

- for the unification of peoples
- for strengthening the countries
- for developing international relations and raising cultural awareness
- for solving both global and each other's problems jointly.



Picture 1. Can you enumerate the member states of the BRICS organization?

This stage of the survey allowed us to understand the main ideas that, according to the respondents, the organization pursues.

The next part of the survey consisted of various questions in the field of studying the topic through an educational game. As a result, we received output data telling us that more than 70 % of the respondents would like to learn more about various actions of the organization and the goals that it pursues. About 21 % are not sure whether it is necessary for them to receive this information and only less than 10 % would not like to continue enhancing their knowledge about the organization.

At the same time, we also obtained the data on how often the target audience plays board games, as well as what percentage of the respondents likes to study something by playing educational board games. We found out that more than 60 % often play board games, while about 40 % do not do it too often, or do not play at all.

The final question showed us what percentage of the audience would like to continue (or start) learning new things about the organization in a playful way. As a result, we received the data that more than 80 % of the respondents would like to play an instructional (informative) game regarding the BRICS, slightly less than 15 % are not sure that they would like it, and less than 5 percent would absolutely not want to play such a game.

The prevailing can-do attitude of the respondents to learn about the organization provided the motive for developing the game. After all, a small percentage of the audience was not familiar, or not informed well enough about the BRICS organization. And the rest would like to deepen their knowledge through the gameplay.

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

The results of the study, including the survey, helped us choose the most convenient game path, as well as take into consideration the learning process there. The survey showed that 30 % of the respondents like games with complex conditions and a large number of chips and add-ons, but 70 % of the audience believe that a simple but interesting game instruction suits better for them.

Thus, the survey results helped to determine all the game criteria and recommendations:

- the mechanics of the game should be as simple and clear as possible;
- the instructions for the game should not be complicated, and also give full information about the composition and purpose of the game ;
- the game should be aimed at studying the organization, as well as obtaining the necessary information about the member states;
- the game should be designed for both an individual player and a two-player/team game;
- the game should be flexible so as not to be boring, regardless of the number of training programs;
- the game should require basic knowledge and concentration of attention;
- the game should be visually attractive.

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

Developing a board game was a complex and time-consuming process, as it required taking into account many details. The mechanics of our game is based on the principle of playing Mahjong, but with some peculiarities regarding facts about the BRICS countries.

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

Thus, the practical significance of the research is determined by the development of the original information board game suitable both for obtaining new knowledge and for improving subsidiary features, such as memory skills. The game helps to develop memory and other necessary skills, while being designed in a visually attractive way. The results of the research also allow us to make the conclusion that many people prefer to learn something new through alternative gameplay, instead of employing traditional methods. A board game is more advantageous compared to traditional ways of learning information, especially in terms of motivation. The prospects for this research may lie in the use of other multimodal tools to improve the English language, for example, by creating a game with a movie plot.

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