

ІННОВАЦІЙНІ ТЕХНОЛОГІЇ ТА МЕТОДИКИ

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EFFECTIVENESS OF SIMULATION GAMES IN FORMING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

Statement of the problem. The modern European space is characterized by the dynamic flow of people, ideas and cultural practices, but the war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine has radically changed the scale and nature of migration processes. Millions of Ukrainians have been forced to leave their homes, a significant part of them ended up in the countries of the European Union (EU), where the integration of young people into new educational environments as well as new communities has become a serious challenge for both the host countries and the forcibly displaced Ukrainians. At the same time, social life in Ukraine has also changed significantly: internally displaced persons (IDPs) need support in restoring their education, social contacts and a sense of security in their new communities.

In this context, intercultural competence (ICC) becomes a key element for the successful adaptation of young people, as it provides the ability to understand each other, accept cultural differences, interact constructively and prevent conflicts. Pedagogical and psychological research demonstrates that the mere transfer of knowledge about other cultures does not guarantee the development of tolerance or readiness for dialogue. Instead, educational methods that immerse young people in simulated interaction situations and allow them to safely relive the experience of another

person, particularly a person affected by war, are much more effective.

Previous studies (Nakaznyj & Kyrpa, 2016; Kyrpa, 2017, 2025) have substantiated the importance of integrating non-formal educational approaches into work with youth and educators, particularly emphasizing the potential of role-playing games and simulations for developing empathy, social sensitivity, ICC, and intercultural communication skills. At the same time, the Ukrainian scientific discourse still lacks solid empirical research that would assess the effectiveness of specific simulation tools in working with youth, especially those who have experienced traumatic war experiences.

Literature review. The issue of ICC has been developed in numerous foreign and Ukrainian studies. Among Ukrainian scientists (Sharova, 2025; Shcherbyna et al., 2024) ICC is considered as an integral part of the professional activities of teachers and future specialists. Scientists emphasize that modern educational programs should include methods that contribute to the development of not only knowledge, but also emotional-value and behavioural components of the competence.

Interactive methods such as simulations or simulation games are considered in the context of developing ICC, empathy, tolerance and skills for working in a multicultural environment (Ihnatova,

2025). ICC increases significantly as a result of students' participation in mobilities, where they are constantly exposed to different cultural communication styles (Przytuła et al., 2023).

The study by Meltzoff and Lenssen (2000) serves as an important theoretical and methodological point of reference, as it confirms that simulations are not just an entertaining addition to learning, but have serious educational and didactic potential. The researchers provide a rationale for integrating gamified or simulation elements into educational programs, especially when it comes to empathy, acceptance of "otherness" and the formation of readiness for real intercultural interaction.

The study by Wiggins (2011) is an attempt to systematize the theoretical and practical basis for intercultural simulations. The researcher proposed clear criteria and a structure for design, which provides a basis for further creation of effective simulations that are not just entertaining, but also form intercultural competence.

The study by Schelfhout and Derious (2023) demonstrated that simulation tools can effectively model intercultural situations and predict an individual's ability to act constructively in different sociocultural contexts. The results confirm their potential for assessing intercultural effectiveness and strengthen the argument for implementing innovative digital solutions in intercultural education.

The research by Gerulaitienė (2015) demonstrates that simulation intercultural games can mediate between theoretical learning and real sociocultural experience, creating conditions for the development of intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes. It reinforces our understanding that the formation of ICC requires not only linguistic or factual training, but also empirical immersion in cultural practices.

Drozd (2024) reinforces the idea that gamification in education is not just a trend, but a meaningful didactic approach that has significant potential for modern educational practices. For example, simulation games (when organised properly) can become an effective means of forming social and civic competencies, communication skills, empathy and readiness for intercultural interaction.

However, the analysed works practically do not focus on the context of war, experienced trauma and forced migration of Ukrainian youth, and there is also a lack of analysis of tools created specifically taking into account these factors. The international Erasmus+ project "UTOPIA: intercultural training to support disPlaced Ukrainians" (hereinafter referred to as UTOPIA) (project code: 2023-2-RO01-KA220-YOU-000174611), fills this gap by offering unique educational material that recreates situations of social tension that forcibly displaced Ukrainians face. Creating a simulation game "Become Agent of Social Changes" (2025) was a significant part of the project. Therefore, **the aim** of this article is to present the results of the simulation game analysis and the effectiveness of its impact on the ICC of youth from different countries, including forcibly displaced youth from Ukraine.

Statement of the main material. In modern research, ICC is defined as an integrative characteristic that encompasses a person's ability to interact effectively with representatives of other cultures, to correctly interpret cultural differences, to demonstrate empathy, adaptability, and openness (Kyrpa, 2025). Since the development of ICC involves simultaneous work with knowledge, emotions, and behaviour, effective means of its formation are learning methods that simulate real sociocultural situations. In this context, game-based approaches are of particular importance, because through play, participants can practice adaptive behaviour, work out interaction strategies, and form empathy in a controlled, safe environment.

Considering modern approaches to game-based learning, two interrelated concepts can be distinguished: "a game" and "a simulation game". In various sources, a game is defined as a socio-cultural phenomenon and a full-fledged pedagogical tool that allows participants to accumulate knowledge, experience and form social and emotional competencies (Drozd, 2024, p. 123). In the reference section of The SAGE Encyclopedia of Intercultural Competence (Fowler, 2015), simulation games are defined as modelling a certain period of life

or socio-cultural situation. A simulation game is also considered as “a model of reality that recreates a certain complex situation and allows participants to experiment with solutions in a safe environment” (Drozd, 2024, p. 125), a created imaginary environment with its own rules and roles, the purpose of which is to teach participants to act in intercultural situations, recognize cultural differences and experience interaction with other cultures (Gerulaitienė, 2015, p. 225), a mediation tool in creating a game-based, creativity-based, educational interaction and the development of ICC (Mažeikienė & Gerulaitiene, 2015, p. 61). In this context, a feature of simulation games is their ability to create a controlled but realistic environment for learning and developing ICC.

In our research, a simulation game will be considered a structured educational activity that models real or problematic social and cultural situations, involves decision-making, analysis of actions, and receiving feedback, combining the cognitive and emotional experience of participants and contributing to the development of ICC, empathy, and readiness for constructive interaction in a multicultural environment.

The peculiarity of simulation games is that they combine intellectual work with emotional experience of the situation, create a safe space for experimenting with behavioural strategies,

allow participants to feel the consequences of decisions and at the same time critically reflect on their own values and prejudices. Participants have the opportunity to “try on” the role of another person, which opens the way to the development of empathy, which is a central element of the ICC (Sharova, 2025).

Simulation games activate not only the cognitive component, but also the socio-emotional one, as they create conditions for empathy, understanding of others, attempts to resolve intercultural conflicts in a safe environment. The use of such games in the educational process contributes to the transition from traditional teaching paradigms (“knowledge – learning”) to a competency-based approach, where learning becomes an experience (learning by doing), which contributes to increasing intercultural interaction (Gerulaitienė, 2015).

The proposed model (Fig. 1) of the formation of ICC reflects the influence of simulation games on ICC of youth based on a combination of modern theories of intercultural education and empirical data obtained within the UTOPIA project.

As shown in Figure 1, the central element of the model is a simulation game as an educational tool capable of simultaneously activating cognitive, emotional, behavioural and motivational processes. Simulation games act as the core through which the participant

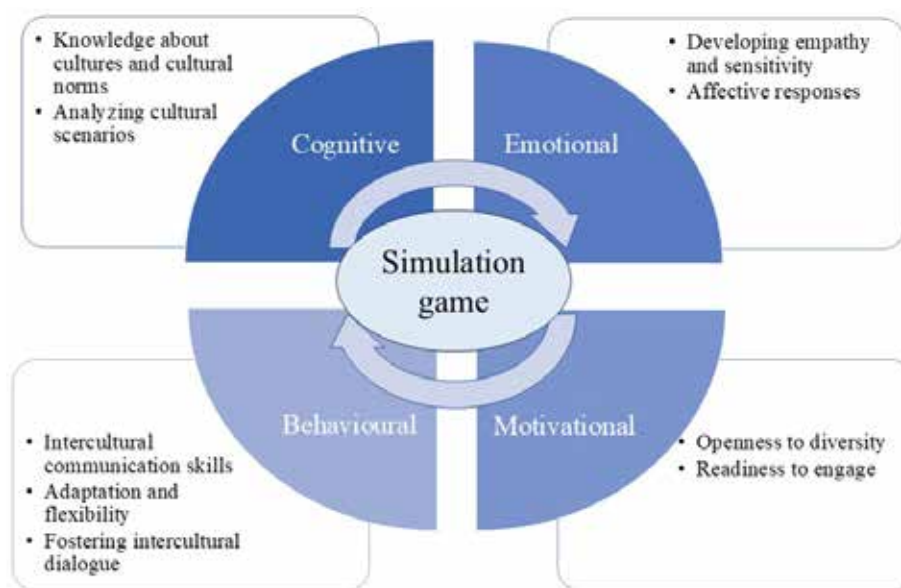


Fig. 1. Model of the influence of simulation games on the ICC of youth

is immersed in a multidimensional experience of intercultural interaction. The cognitive block demonstrates that simulation games contribute to the actualization of existing cultural knowledge and the formation of new ideas about social norms, cultural values, characteristic communication styles and typical conflict situations. The emotional component of the model emphasizes the importance of emotional involvement and empathetic reaction that arises in the process of “living” the perspective of another person, particularly a representative of a vulnerable social group. The behavioural component reflects the development of the ability to flexibly adapt one’s own behaviour, apply constructive communication strategies and make decisions in conditions of intercultural uncertainty. The motivational component explains how simulation increases internal readiness for intercultural interaction, strengthens openness to diversity and stimulates a value-based desire for social change.

These four components form an interconnected system where simulation experience accelerates the integration of knowledge, emotions, and practical action. The model shows that simulation games not only imitate real situations of intercultural contacts, but also create conditions for understanding one’s own reactions and transforming attitudes, which makes them a powerful tool for the development of the ICC of youth.

The analysis of simulation tools for the development of the ICC demonstrates that gaming platforms are becoming important in the context of growing cultural diversity, migration processes, and the need to form tolerant societies.

That is why the simulation game “Become Agent of Social Changes”, developed during the implementation of the international project UTOPIA, is gaining particular relevance. The game offers users to immerse themselves in interactive storylines that reflect the experiences of refugees, forcibly displaced people and representatives of different cultural groups. Such emotional involvement of the user creates the prerequisites for the development

of empathy, critical understanding of social realities and increased intercultural sensitivity.

In this regard, the game “Become Agent of Social Changes” stands out among other tools because it combines gamification with civic education and socio-emotional learning, creating a unique space for understanding cultural differences. For example, diagnostic simulation games such as Direct Intercultural Effectiveness Simulation (DIES) (Schelfhout & Derious, 2023) focus primarily on identifying implicit trait policy which is a combination of personal characteristics, attitudes and knowledge that determines a person’s predisposition to effective behaviour in intercultural interaction. DIES provides a standardized assessment of intercultural effectiveness and can be used in research, professional selection or monitoring of training results. In turn, “Become Agent of Social Changes” focuses on the formation of attitudes, emotional involvement and social understanding; those components often determine readiness for constructive intercultural interaction no less than formal competencies.

In existing simulation games for the development of ICC, such as “Ecotonos” and “An Alien Among Us”, the emphasis is placed on modelling tense situations caused by the clash of different cultural norms. “Ecotonos” recreates the interaction of fictional cultures with contrasting rules of behaviour, forcing participants to look for strategies for harmonization and overcoming conflicts. “An Alien Among Us” focuses on overcoming ethnocentrism, when the group has to interpret the behaviour of the “other” that is radically different from the usual patterns (Gerulaitienė, 2015).

Wiggins’ (2011) “ARGONAUTONLINE” offers a structured environment with “synthetic cultures”, problem-oriented tasks and a cycle of “experience-reflection-learning”, which promotes the development of intercultural communication and the formation of specific competencies through the analysis of solutions and adaptation to fictional cultural rules. It is worth considering that the participant often interacts in “third places” or synthetic cultures and it is necessary to adapt to fictional rules and cultural contexts.

Against the background of such simulation games, “Become Agent of Social Changes” offers cooperative, digital interaction in which participants do not recreate artificial cultures and do not act out situations of misunderstanding, but jointly form a common vision of the situation and mutual understanding, based on their own values and experience. Due to this, “Become Agent of Social Changes” shifts the focus from intercultural conflict to joint creation, understanding of values and productive dialogue, which corresponds to updated approaches to intercultural education in the digital age. In essence, “Become Agent of Social Changes” is a decision-based game, which can be considered as a type of simulation game in which learning occurs through making decisions in simulated intercultural situations and experiencing the consequences of these decisions. The game offers six interactive storylines, presented from the side of forcibly displaced persons or IDPs and local residents who witnessed the case. Each choice changes the course of the story and leads to one of several possible endings. The game examines situations that can occur in an educational institution, in the workplace and in everyday life (Kyrpa, 2025). This format allows participants to safely experiment with behavioural strategies, developing components of the ICC from empathy to conflict flexibility.

Thus, “Become Agent of Social Changes” is considered as an example of a new type of simulation game, where participants not only model intercultural and social processes, but also co-create valuable and social solutions in a digital environment. This approach combines cooperative learning, practical interaction and emotional engagement, which contributes to the development of intercultural sensitivity, empathy and readiness for constructive interaction in real conditions.

In order to study the impact of the simulation game “Become Agent of Social Changes” on the formation of youth ICC, four final reports of partner organizations of the UTOPIA project (Association of Community Development Consultants (Romania), KAINOTOMIA (Greece), Centrum Wspierania Edukacji i Przedsiębiorczości

(Poland), Union for the Development of Education and Science (Ukraine) were studied. The reports included participant feedback, survey results, focus group interviews and qualitative analysis content. The study involved 160 people: young people aged 15-30 and youth workers from partner countries.

The research methods included empirical data analysis, comparative analysis, and content analysis of open-ended responses from participants which allowed for a comprehensive assessment of the impact of the simulation game on participants. Regarding the results we could identify several key psychological and pedagogical conditions for the development of ICC:

1. *Emotional immersion as a condition for building empathy.* All partners note that participants felt a high level of immersion in the game situation. It is emphasized that the scenarios look extremely realistic and resemble real-life situations which they or their friends or acquaintances once experienced. This emotional involvement became the basis for a deep experience, which opens the way to building empathy, critical reflection on prejudices and greater readiness to support IDPs.

2. *Impact on values and attitudes.* Some participants noted that the simulation game forced them to rethink their own initial reactions to conflict situations, particularly those related to discrimination. Young people admitted that they did not use to notice microaggressions or indirect forms of prejudice. Due to working with realistic stories, they were able to assess what emotions a person experiences when faced with prejudice, and how tolerance can affect their condition.

3. *Development of communication flexibility and conflict resolution skills.* The educators and youth workers noted that participants demonstrated significant improvements in communication skills, including the ability to non-violent communication, seek compromise, and actively listen to others. The simulation game allowed young people to test different styles of behaviour and see which solutions lead to escalation and which to mutual understanding.

4. *Increased motivation for intercultural interaction.* The participants emphasized that

after completing the simulation game, they had a stronger desire to participate in international programs, join volunteer initiatives, and help displaced youth. This indicates its significant impact on the motivational component of ICC.

Thus, the obtained results confirm the relevance and effectiveness of simulation games in the formation of the ICC. Simulation games or simulations were able to change value beliefs, influence the emotional state, and contribute to the rethinking of social roles and relationships. This is extremely important in the context of the experience of Ukraine, where war and forced migration have posed new challenges to society related to the integration of IDPs and the preservation of social cohesion.

The data also indicate that simulation methods (primarily games) should be integrated not only into non-formal education programs, but also into formal education, in particular in civic education lessons, foreign languages, and integrated courses at the New Ukrainian School.

Conclusions. Thus, the use of simulation games is justified in the context of intercultural education and can be an important component of strategies for

preparing applicants in a multicultural educational environment. Simulation games contribute to deep emotional immersion, the development of empathy, critical understanding of prejudices, improvement of communication skills and increased motivation to interact with representatives of other cultures. The relevance of the simulation game “Become Agent of Social Changes” lies in the ability to combine an educational mission with the support of integration processes, as well as in the creation of an accessible, emotionally resonant tool that meets the challenges of the modern European and Ukrainian context. That is why the analysis of this game is important and timely for the study of modern practices of intercultural learning.

The study also showed that simulation games have significant potential for integration into formal and non-formal education as a means of developing ICC, supporting social integration and cohesion in a multicultural society. However, its effectiveness requires further study in the context of Ukrainian education in wartime, when there is an acute need to restore trust, develop empathy, and form skills for peaceful coexistence in traumatized communities.

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Кырпа А. В. Effectiveness of simulation games in forming intercultural competence

The article describes the effectiveness of simulation games as innovative means of forming intercultural competence (ICC) of youth in the conditions of growing cultural diversity and active migration processes caused by the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation into Ukraine. Particular attention is paid to the pedagogical potential of story-based simulation games that recreate real situations of intercultural misunderstandings, conflicts, manifestations of discrimination and social exclusion. The article presents the results of the analysis of the simulation game “Become Agent of Social Changes” and describes the effectiveness of its impact on the formation of ICC of youth from three countries of the European Union and forcibly displaced youth from Ukraine. “Become Agent of Social Changes” is a type of a simulation game in which learning occurs through making decisions in simulated intercultural situations and experiencing the consequences of these decisions. The simulation game offers unique educational material that recreates situations of social tension that forcibly displaced Ukrainians face. The simulation game was developed and tested within the framework of the international Erasmus+ project “UTOPIA: intercultural training to support displaced Ukrainians”. Based on qualitative and quantitative data collected during surveys of educators, youth workers and young people in Romania, Greece, Poland and Ukraine, it was demonstrated that simulation games provide deep emotional immersion, promote the development of empathy, critical thinking, the ability to resolve conflicts in non-violent ways and significantly increase the level of readiness of young people for constructive interaction in multicultural groups. The results confirm the importance of simulations as an effective tool of non-formal education and create a basis for updating the programs of socio-humanitarian training of youth in Ukraine.

Key words: intercultural competence (ICC), international project, simulation game, game-based learning, pedagogical innovations.

Кирпа А. В. Ефективність симуляційних ігор у формуванні міжкультурної компетентності

У статті описано ефективності симуляційних ігор як інноваційних засобів формування міжкультурної компетентності (МКК) молоді в умовах зростання культурного різноманіття та активних міграційних процесів, спричинених повномасштабним вторгненням Російської Федерації в Україну. Особливу увагу зосереджено на педагогічному потенціалі сюжетних симуляційних ігор, що відтворюють реальні ситуації міжкультурних непорозумінь, конфліктів, проявів дискримінації та соціального відчуження. У статті представлено результати аналізу симуляційної гри “Become Agent of Social Changes” та описано ефективність її впливу на формування МКК молоді з трьох країн Європейського Союзу та вимушено переміщеної молоді з України. “Become Agent of Social Changes” є різновидом симуляційної гри, у якій навчання відбувається через прийняття рішень у змодельованих міжкультурних ситуаціях і проживання наслідків цих рішень. Симуляційна гра пропонує унікальний навчальний матеріал, що відтворює ситуації соціального напруження, з якими стикаються вимушено переміщені українці. Означена симуляційна гра була розроблена та апробована в межах міжнародного проєкту Erasmus+ “UTOPIA: intercultural Training to support disPlaced UkrainIAns”. На основі якісних і кількісних даних, зібраних під час опитувань молодіжних працівників та молодих людей у Румунії, Греції, Польщі та Україні, продемонстровано, що симуляційні ігри забезпечують глибоке емоційне занурення, сприяють розвитку емпатії, критичного мислення, здатності розв’язувати конфлікти ненасильницькими способами та значно підвищують рівень готовності молоді до конструктивної взаємодії в мультикультурних групах. Результати підтверджують важливість симуляцій як ефективного інструменту неформальної освіти й створюють підґрунтя для оновлення програм соціально-гуманітарної підготовки молоді в Україні.

Ключові слова: міжкультурна компетентність (МКК), міжнародний проєкт, симуляційна гра, навчання на основі гри, педагогічні інновації.

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