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THE ROLE OF FOLK GAMES IN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL ADAPTATION OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract: This study examines the role of folk games in the psychological adaptation of preschool children within educational settings. Psychological adaptation in early childhood is a complex process that includes emotional regulation, social interaction, behavioral adjustment, and cognitive development. The research highlights that folk games, as culturally rooted and socially structured forms of play, provide favorable conditions for supporting children's adaptation to preschool environments. Through collective participation, emotional expressiveness, and rule-based interaction, folk games contribute to reducing anxiety, enhancing emotional stability, and developing social competence among preschool children. The findings indicate that systematic integration of folk games into preschool educational practices promotes psychological well-being, strengthens adaptive behavior, and supports the holistic development of children during a critical stage of personality formation.

Keywords: folk games, psychological adaptation, preschool children, emotional development, social competence, play-based learning.

РОЛЬ НАРОДНЫХ ИГР В ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКОЙ АДАПТАЦИИ ДЕТЕЙ ДОШКОЛЬНОГО ВОЗРАСТА

Аннотация: В данном исследовании рассматривается роль народных игр в психологической адаптации детей дошкольного возраста в образовательной среде. Психологическая адаптация в раннем детстве представляет собой сложный процесс, включающий эмоциональную регуляцию, социальное взаимодействие, поведенческую адаптацию и когнитивное развитие. В работе подчеркивается, что народные игры, как культурно обусловленные и социально организованные формы игровой деятельности, создают благоприятные условия для адаптации детей к условиям дошкольного учреждения. Коллективный характер, эмоциональная насыщенность и наличие правил в народных играх способствуют снижению тревожности, формированию эмоциональной устойчивости и развитию социальной компетентности у детей дошкольного возраста. Результаты исследования подтверждают, что систематическое использование народных игр в образовательной практике способствует психологическому благополучию и гармоничному развитию личности ребенка.

Ключевые слова: народные игры, психологическая адаптация, дети дошкольного возраста, эмоциональное развитие, социальная компетентность, игровая деятельность.



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Psychological adaptation in early childhood is one of the most critical conditions for a child's successful integration into the social and educational environment. Preschool age is characterized by intensive emotional development, the formation of basic social skills, and the emergence of self-regulation mechanisms. During this sensitive period, children often face adaptation difficulties caused by separation from family, entry into preschool institutions, changes in social roles, and the necessity to interact with peers and adults in new contexts. In this regard, folk games represent a culturally grounded and psychologically effective pedagogical tool that supports emotional stability, social competence, and adaptive behavior in preschool children.

Psychological adaptation is understood as a dynamic process through which a child adjusts to new social conditions while maintaining emotional balance and internal comfort. According to developmental psychology, successful adaptation in preschool age includes emotional security, positive communication skills, adequate behavioral responses, and the ability to cope with stressors typical for early childhood⁶. Folk games, as an integral element of traditional culture, create a natural environment in which these adaptive mechanisms develop organically through play activity. From a psychological perspective, play is the leading activity in preschool age. L. S. Vygotsky emphasized that play creates a "zone of proximal development" in which children demonstrate higher levels of emotional and social competence than in non-play situations⁷. Folk games differ from other types of play because they are socially regulated, emotionally expressive, and culturally meaningful. They involve rules, collective actions, rhythmic movements, verbal interaction, and symbolic elements, all of which contribute to the child's psychological adaptation.

One of the most important functions of folk games is emotional regulation. Preschool children often experience anxiety, fear, frustration, and emotional instability, especially during the adaptation period to preschool institutions. Folk games usually include repetitive movements, songs, and predictable structures that create a sense of safety and emotional comfort. Psychological research shows that rhythmic and repetitive play activities reduce cortisol levels and promote emotional relaxation in young children⁸. Through joyful participation in folk games, children learn to manage emotions, express feelings appropriately, and experience positive emotional states, which are essential indicators of successful psychological adaptation.

Social adaptation is another key component of psychological adjustment in preschool age. Folk games are predominantly collective in nature and require cooperation, turn-taking, mutual assistance, and adherence to social rules. Participation in such games helps children develop basic social skills, including communication, empathy, and conflict resolution. According to social learning theory, children acquire social behaviors through observation and imitation within group activities. Folk games provide a structured social environment in which children observe peers, internalize social norms, and practice

⁶ Piaget J. *The Psychology of the Child*. Basic Books, 1969.

⁷ Vygotsky L. S. *Mind in Society*. Harvard University Press, 1978.

⁸ Panksepp J. *Affective Neuroscience*. Oxford University Press, 1998.



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socially acceptable behaviors in a non-threatening context. Moreover, folk games play a significant role in the development of self-identity and self-esteem. Cultural psychologists argue that a child's sense of belonging and identity begins to form in early childhood through interaction with culturally meaningful practices⁹. Folk games transmit cultural values, symbols, and traditions, enabling children to feel connected to their community and cultural heritage. This sense of belonging enhances psychological security and supports adaptive behavior, especially in unfamiliar or stressful environments such as preschool settings.

Cognitive adaptation is also supported through folk games. Many traditional games involve problem-solving, memory, attention, and symbolic thinking. For example, games that require remembering sequences, following verbal instructions, or responding to symbolic cues stimulate cognitive processes closely linked to adaptive functioning. Research in developmental psychology indicates that cognitive flexibility and attention control are essential components of adaptation in early childhood. Folk games enhance these abilities in a natural and engaging way, without causing cognitive overload or stress.

Language development, which is closely related to psychological adaptation, is another area influenced by folk games. Traditional games often include songs, rhymes, dialogues, and repetitive verbal expressions. These linguistic elements enrich vocabulary, improve phonemic awareness, and foster communicative competence. According to psycholinguistic studies, children who actively participate in language-rich play demonstrate higher levels of verbal self-expression and social confidence¹⁰. Improved communication skills facilitate smoother adaptation to preschool environments by reducing misunderstandings and social withdrawal.

From the standpoint of behavioral adaptation, folk games help children internalize rules and norms in a flexible and emotionally supportive manner. Unlike rigid instructional methods, folk games present rules as part of an enjoyable activity, making compliance voluntary and meaningful. Behavioral psychologists note that internal motivation is more effective than external control in shaping adaptive behavior in early childhood. Through folk games, children learn self-control, patience, and responsibility while maintaining positive emotional engagement. Folk games also contribute to stress resistance and resilience. Adaptation to preschool life often involves stress factors such as separation anxiety, peer conflicts, and unfamiliar routines. Studies in child psychology indicate that play-based interventions significantly reduce adaptation-related stress and behavioral problems¹¹. Folk games, with their cooperative and emotionally supportive nature, function as a psychological buffer, helping children cope with stress and recover from negative experiences more effectively.

An important pedagogical aspect of folk games is their inclusivity. These games are typically simple, flexible, and adaptable to different developmental levels, allowing children with varying psychological characteristics to participate equally. Inclusive

⁹ Rogoff B. *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*. Oxford University Press, 2003.

¹⁰ Snow C. E. *Language and Literacy Development in Early Childhood*. Guilford Press, 1998.

¹¹ Pellegrini A. D. *The Role of Play in Human Development*. Oxford University Press, 2009.



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participation strengthens self-confidence and prevents feelings of isolation or inadequacy, which are common risk factors for maladaptation¹². In this sense, folk games serve as a preventive pedagogical tool that supports psychological well-being and positive adaptation outcomes.

In contemporary preschool education, the relevance of folk games remains high despite the increasing influence of digital technologies. While digital games often promote individual engagement, folk games emphasize live interaction, emotional exchange, and physical presence, which are essential for psychological adaptation in early childhood. Researchers warn that excessive screen-based activities may limit social interaction and emotional development in preschool children. Therefore, integrating folk games into modern educational practices is not only culturally valuable but also psychologically necessary.

Conclusion

The psychological adaptation of preschool children is a complex, multidimensional process that determines their successful integration into social and educational environments. This study has shown that folk games represent a highly effective pedagogical and psychological resource for supporting adaptation processes in early childhood. As a culturally rooted form of play activity, folk games naturally combine emotional, social, cognitive, and behavioral components, which are essential for the harmonious development of the child's personality. The analysis confirms that folk games contribute significantly to emotional stability by reducing anxiety, fear, and stress commonly experienced by preschool children during adaptation periods. Their repetitive structure, rhythmic elements, and positive emotional content create a psychologically safe environment that promotes emotional regulation and inner comfort. This emotional security serves as a foundation for further adaptive behaviors and social engagement.

In terms of social adaptation, folk games foster communication skills, cooperation, empathy, and adherence to social norms. Through collective participation, children learn to interact with peers, resolve conflicts peacefully, and accept social roles. Such experiences are crucial for developing social competence and preventing maladaptive behaviors in preschool settings. The study also highlights the cognitive and linguistic benefits of folk games. Traditional games stimulate attention, memory, symbolic thinking, and verbal expression, which are closely related to adaptive functioning. Language-rich elements of folk games enhance communicative confidence, enabling children to express their needs and emotions more effectively, thereby facilitating smoother adaptation to new social environments.

Furthermore, folk games play an important role in strengthening self-esteem, resilience, and cultural identity. By engaging in culturally meaningful activities, preschool children develop a sense of belonging and psychological security, which positively influences their adaptive potential. In the context of modern preschool education, where

¹² Guralnick M. J. *Early Intervention and Inclusion*. Brookes Publishing, 2017.



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digitalization and reduced live interaction are increasingly observed, folk games remain an irreplaceable means of ensuring balanced psychological development.

In conclusion, folk games should be regarded as an essential component of preschool pedagogical practice aimed at supporting psychological adaptation. Their systematic and purposeful integration into educational processes enhances emotional well-being, social competence, and adaptive behavior in preschool children, contributing to their holistic development and long-term psychological health.

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