

Experts Speak

Educational Cooperation as Strategic Architecture: A Conversation with Dr. Gunay Abilova

Dr. Gunay Abilova

Director, BRICS+ International School; Head, International Competence Centre for BRICS Education Systems

Interviewed by **Dr. Kumari Mansi**, Managing Editor, BRICS Perspective

An interview with Dr. Gunay Abilova on educational cooperation on, people-to-people ties and the evolving BRICS+ youth agenda.

In this conversation for BRICS Perspective, Dr. Gunay Abilova reflects on how education, educational tourism, mutual recognition of qualifications, youth leadership and collaborative knowledge systems can strengthen the humanitarian dimension of BRICS+ cooperation under India's Presidency.



Question 1

Dr. Mansi: *BRICS Presidency 2026 carries the vision of fostering an inclusive, reform-oriented multilateral order. As the head of the BRICS+ International School, how do you see educational cooperation and people-to-people connection serving as a foundational pillar for the Summit's agenda? What role can institutions like yours play in translating the Summit's political vision into tangible youth-driven outcomes?*

Dr. Gunay Abilova

At present, educational cooperation and people-to-people contacts occupy a special place in the BRICS+ agenda in 2026. This area of cooperation among countries is shaping a fundamentally new dimension of international relations, based on the long-term development of human capital, intellectual engagement and cultural understanding. While the economic and political dimensions form the institutional and substantive foundation of international interaction, education is the mechanism through which knowledge, competencies and values are reproduced, creating the conditions for the development of human capital capable of ensuring the sustainable development of the participating states.

The importance of this area for the development of BRICS+ countries, in today's conditions of global competition in intellectual production, scientific and technological advancement, and the training of highly qualified human resources, is beyond doubt. It is education that creates the long-term prerequisites for the stability of a multipolar world order over the coming decades. In this regard, the inclusion of the educational agenda among the priorities of BRICS+ is not merely important; it is a strategically necessary step.

In this context, it is important to emphasise the crucial role of the emerging BRICS+ educational space, which should become a sustainable ecosystem of youth interaction, bringing together schools, universities, research centres and youth organisations of the participating countries, while creating an integration-based foundation for cooperation among national education systems operating within BRICS for the purpose of training a new generation of specialists.

Such a system will not only ensure the exchange of knowledge but will also contribute to the development among young people of intercultural communication skills, the ability to solve global problems jointly, and responsible leadership in the context of an emerging multipolar world.

That is why the work of institutions such as the BRICS+ International School acquires particular significance as a genuinely functioning platform for international humanitarian cooperation. Today, we view our mission not only as educational, but also as integrative. In this regard, our task is to create conditions for the continuous interaction of young people from different countries, to develop their competencies in international cooperation, and to strengthen their ability to work effectively in a multinational and multicultural environment.

The practical implementation of this task is carried out through international educational projects, youth forums, research programmes, debates, business games and joint initiatives devoted to current issues in the development of BRICS+ countries and implemented within the framework of the BRICS+ School. A special role is played by projects in which young people have the opportunity not only to discuss existing problems, but also to develop their own proposals for solving them. This approach makes it possible to move educational interaction from the level of theoretical discussion into the sphere of practical international cooperation.

An equally important area of activity is the development of global thinking skills among young people while maintaining respect for national identity and the cultural traditions of their own countries. In this case, we proceed from the understanding that a sustainable multipolar world is impossible without a combination of national self-awareness and openness to international dialogue. That is why the educational programmes of the BRICS+ International School are focused on developing intercultural competence, civic responsibility and an understanding of the common development challenges of the modern world, which is relevant for all participating countries seeking to strengthen their own sovereignty and expand international cooperation on the principles of equality and mutual respect.

Special attention in the work of the BRICS+ School is given to supporting youth initiatives in the implementation of which young people act not only as participants in educational programmes, but also as their direct co-authors. In this area, the most important task is to create mechanisms that allow young people to initiate international projects independently, participate in the development of joint solutions, and present their proposals at BRICS+ platforms. It is precisely this approach that makes it possible to

transform the political vision for the development of the bloc into measurable practical initiatives, shifting educational activity into the realm of real transcontinental interaction.

Thus, today BRICS+ International School is capable of serving as a link between strategic decisions adopted at the interstate level and real youth initiatives. Through educational programmes, research projects and youth networks, we can contribute to the training of a new generation of leaders oriented towards cooperation, mutual respect and joint development. In this process, the BRICS+ School is called upon to serve as a platform for shaping future leaders, as a generator of youth initiatives, and as an important institution for strengthening the humanitarian dimension of cooperation among BRICS+ countries.

India has a particularly important role to play in the development of these areas, as it is currently one of the world's largest centres of education, science and the training of highly qualified personnel. India's rich civilisational heritage and its experience in combining traditional educational values with modern scientific and technological achievements create unique opportunities for expanding humanitarian cooperation within BRICS+.

In this regard, Indian educational initiatives, university programmes and youth projects can become an important factor in further strengthening the BRICS+ educational space based on the principles of mutual respect, cultural diversity and equal partnership.

Question 2

Dr. Mansi: *The BRICS International Competence Centre has identified educational tourism as a key instrument for deepening intra-BRICS people-to-people connections. With India's rich civilisational heritage and its growing stature as a global education hub, what specific educational tourism corridors or exchange frameworks between India and BRICS+ nations would you prioritise, and how can these be institutionalised under India's presidency?*

Dr. Gunay Abilova

Educational tourism is currently entering a new stage of development, connected with the globalisation of the educational space, the digital transformation of international cooperation, and the growing interest of young people in intercultural interaction. In this regard, this form of educational cooperation has considerable potential as an instrument for building sustainable humanitarian ties among the peoples of BRICS+ countries. Its distinctive feature is the informal nature of interaction among participants, which makes it possible to combine educational activity with direct immersion in the cultural and social environment of partner states. Unlike traditional academic exchanges, this form of educational interaction allows learning to be combined with direct exposure to the history, culture, scientific achievements and socio-economic models of partner states.

That is why, during India's Chair, this area can become one of the key mechanisms for strengthening a unified BRICS+ educational space. Taking into account India's unique civilisational heritage and its growing role as a global educational centre, several educational tourism corridors appear to be priorities.

In this context, the “Ancient Civilisations of BRICS+” corridor should be regarded as a highly promising form of educational cooperation, focused on the study of the historical and cultural heritage of the countries of the association. Within this form of educational tourism, students could visit sites such as Varanasi, Nalanda and Bodh Gaya in India, ancient historical centres in China, and cultural monuments in Russia, Brazil, South Africa and other BRICS+ states. Such programmes are unique and are intended to foster respect for cultural diversity, strengthen inter-civilisational dialogue, and develop mutual understanding among young people from different countries.

No less promising is the creation of a “BRICS+ Science, Technology and Innovation” corridor, providing for short-term educational internships for students at leading universities, research centres, technology parks and innovation clusters in the states of the bloc. For India, areas such as digital technologies, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, space research and pharmaceuticals may be of particular importance here. These areas are also at the centre of attention in other BRICS+ states, and therefore the development of joint educational routes and research internships will create conditions for the formation of a unified scientific and educational space of the bloc, while also contributing to the development of international academic mobility and the exchange of advanced knowledge.

The “Young BRICS+ Leaders” initiative, aimed at training future managerial personnel, also requires intensive development today. Its foundation could include international schools, youth forums, BRICS model summits, diplomatic simulations and project laboratories, within which young people would jointly develop solutions to pressing socio-economic and humanitarian challenges. Such formats can ensure the training of a new generation of specialists possessing international cooperation skills and an understanding of the specific features of a multipolar world order.

A separate area deserving attention is educational tourism related to sustainable development and the environmental agenda. Joint expeditions, research fieldwork and volunteer projects will allow young people to acquire practical experience in international cooperation while addressing global environmental and social problems. This area becomes particularly significant in the context of the need to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and to cultivate environmental responsibility among future generations.

To institutionalise these initiatives during India’s Chair, it is planned to develop a unified BRICS+ educational tourism programme operating on the basis of the BRICS Network University, BRICS Affiliated Schools and the BRICS Excellence Centre. An important step in this direction could be the establishment of a special BRICS+ Coordinating Council on Educational Tourism, as well as the development of a unified digital platform that would provide participant registration, academic recognition of learning outcomes, the exchange of educational resources, and support for joint projects.

In addition, it would be advisable to establish an annual BRICS+ Youth Educational Route, within which students would consecutively visit several member states of the association, becoming acquainted with their education systems, cultures and development practices. This format would make it possible to transform educational tourism from a set of separate events into a sustainable mechanism for building a community of young BRICS+ leaders capable, in the future, of developing humanitarian, scientific and economic cooperation among our countries and strengthening the unity of BRICS+ as one of the centres of the emerging multipolar world.

Question 3

Dr. Mansi: *You have emphasised the need to integrate national educational systems within BRICS to train the next generation of personnel. Given the diversity of languages, curricula, and pedagogical traditions across the expanded BRICS+ grouping, what innovative models of mutual recognition — whether of degrees, skills certifications, or professional qualifications — do you envision, and how far has the BRICS Skills Excellence Centre progressed in building this architecture?*

Dr. Gunay Abilova

At present, without addressing the task of integrating national education systems within BRICS+, it is impossible to ensure full academic mobility for students, teachers and young professionals, or to form a common market for highly qualified human resources within the bloc. In solving this task, the creation of mechanisms for the mutual recognition of educational outcomes, professional competencies and qualifications is undoubtedly a priority area, especially given that BRICS+ countries today possess a considerable diversity of education systems, languages of instruction, professional standards and pedagogical traditions.

At the same time, our position is that such diversity should be regarded not as an obstacle, but as a source of mutual enrichment and development. In this regard, a model appears relevant in which the aim is not the mechanical creation of a single unified education system, but rather the formation of a coordinated architecture for the recognition of qualifications based on the principles of comparability, transparency and mutual trust.

The most promising basis for this model is a multi-level system for recognising educational outcomes. The first level may be connected with the mutual recognition of academic credits and learning modules, enabling students to complete individual courses and educational programmes at universities in BRICS+ countries and subsequently have the results credited at their home educational institutions. The second level should involve the creation of a unified system for recognising professional certificates and digital micro-credentials confirming the acquisition of specific competencies in such areas as information technology, artificial intelligence, engineering, medicine, energy and management. The final, third level may be connected with the gradual development of mechanisms for the mutual recognition of diplomas and professional qualifications in priority fields of study and training.

Of particular interest is the introduction of digital competency passports containing information on education received, professional skills, internships, scientific achievements and the international experience of learners. The use of modern digital technologies will make it possible to significantly increase the transparency and comparability of educational outcomes, as well as to simplify procedures for the recognition of qualifications between the countries of the bloc.

The BRICS Skills Excellence Centre (BRICS Competences Centre) plays an important role in solving this task. It already contributes to the formation of a shared understanding of the future competencies in demand, the development of cooperation between educational institutions and employers, and the exchange of best practices in personnel training. One of the most significant areas of the Centre's work is the development of approaches to the harmonisation of professional standards and the creation of a skills assessment system recognised by BRICS+ states.

In our view, the next stage of the Centre's work could be the formation of a "BRICS+ Qualifications Recognition Framework", which would make it possible to compare national educational and professional standards without losing their national specificity. Such a system could become the basis for further expanding academic mobility, implementing joint educational programmes, developing network-based forms of learning, and training specialists of a new generation.

Ultimately, this is not only about recognising diplomas or certificates, because the main task is much broader: to create a unified space of opportunity in which young people from BRICS+ countries can freely acquire knowledge, develop competencies and realise their professional potential while preserving the national identity and cultural diversity of their states. It is precisely this approach that can form the human resources foundation for the further development of BRICS+ as one of the leading centres of the emerging multipolar world.

Question 4

Dr. Mansi: *The BRICS+ International School has cultivated a global community of young BRICSologists since 2017. As BRICS expands and its agenda becomes more complex, how should the youth track evolve — particularly in building a new generation of leaders who understand not just the original BRICS five but the broader BRICS+ constellation? What role can India's academic institutions and think tanks play in co-hosting and co-designing these programmes?*

Dr. Gunay Abilova

Since its establishment in 2017, the International BRICS+ School has consistently been forming an international community of young researchers, experts and leaders interested in studying the development processes of the association. Over these years, a generation of young "BRICSologists" has indeed emerged, possessing knowledge of the mechanisms of international cooperation, economic integration and humanitarian interaction among the member states. This, in principle, creates the prerequisites for forming a new generation of experts capable of professionally supporting BRICS+ development processes in the long term.

However, the expansion of BRICS and the formation of the new BRICS+ architecture objectively place new tasks before us.

If at the initial stage the main emphasis was placed on studying the specific features of the five founding states of the association, today the youth agenda requires educational programmes to reflect the significantly more complex and multidimensional structure of BRICS+. At the same time, the development of new areas of political analysis requires young specialists to understand deeply the specific features of interaction among the states that make up the association, since it includes countries belonging to different civilisations, cultural traditions, political systems and models of socio-economic development. Accordingly, under these conditions, it becomes necessary to train a new generation of political leaders and political analysts capable of understanding not only the national characteristics of individual countries, but also the patterns of functioning of a multipolar world as a whole.

In this regard, the BRICS+ youth agenda in the area of forming future political and public leaders should evolve along several key lines.

First of all, it is necessary to move from the study of individual countries to the formation of a systemic understanding of international cooperation processes within the expanded association. Young people should possess knowledge in the fields of economics, international relations, technology, sustainable development, humanitarian cooperation and intercultural communication. They should be able to work in multinational teams, understand the specific features of different civilisational models of development, and find solutions that take into account the interests of all participants in the bloc.

An equally important area is the development of practice-oriented forms of youth training, since today it is no longer sufficient to limit oneself to studying the theoretical aspects of international cooperation. In this regard, it is necessary to create conditions for young people to participate in joint research projects, international expert discussions, business games, BRICS+ model summits and project laboratories. This makes it possible to develop real competencies in international interaction and to train specialists capable of making decisions under conditions of high complexity and uncertainty.

Particular importance is attached to developing so-called global thinking among young people while maintaining respect for their own national identity. BRICS+ represents a unique space for dialogue among different cultures and civilisations, and therefore one of the most important tasks of educational programmes is to nurture leaders capable of combining national responsibility with an understanding of the common interests of international development.

In this context, Indian academic institutions and think tanks can play an exceptionally important role, given that India has one of the world's largest higher education systems, significant scientific potential and extensive experience in training specialists of international calibre. In addition, India's civilisational tradition has historically developed as a space of interaction among different cultures, languages and religions, which makes it an especially valuable partner in the development of BRICS+ humanitarian cooperation.

India's rich experience in training specialists in international relations, public administration, public policy and strategic studies is of particular value for the BRICS+ youth agenda. In the context of the formation of a multipolar world order, the need is growing for young leaders with broad political horizons, capable of understanding the specific features of different civilisational models of development, analysing international processes, and building constructive dialogue among states and peoples.

That is why Indian universities, research institutes and think tanks can become important partners in the development of next-generation educational programmes focused on the study of global politics, international economics, diplomacy, regional studies and mechanisms of international cooperation. Of particular significance is the organisation of joint youth forums, analytical schools, BRICS+ model summits, diplomatic simulations and research projects that allow young people to gain practical experience in discussing current issues of world politics.

In addition, India can become one of the key centres for forming an international network of young "BRICSologists", bringing together students, postgraduate students, young researchers and public leaders from BRICS+ states. Such a network can become an important mechanism for training a new

generation of experts with a deep understanding not only of the original BRICS “five”, but also of the broader BRICS+ architecture, which reflects the interests of the Global South and the principles of the emerging multipolar world.

Undoubtedly, the further development of the BRICS+ youth agenda should be directed towards forming a community of new-generation young leaders capable of thinking strategically, respecting cultural diversity and working effectively in the interests of strengthening international cooperation. It is this youth that, in the coming decades, will determine the nature of interaction among BRICS+ states and, to a considerable extent, shape the future of the multipolar world.

Question 5

Dr. Mansi: *Beyond student exchanges, BRICS+ nations hold enormous potential for collaborative research, joint degree programmes, and shared digital learning platforms. How do you envision the BRICS Skills Excellence Centre contributing to a BRICS knowledge economy — one that challenges the Western monopoly on academic publishing, ranking systems, and research funding — and what concrete steps are being taken under India's presidency to advance this agenda?*

Dr. Gunay Abilova

There is no doubt that BRICS+ countries possess considerable scientific, educational and intellectual potential. The bloc brings together thousands of universities, research centres, technology parks and innovative companies, and each year millions of specialists graduate in various fields of knowledge. At the same time, the existing global architecture of scientific and educational interaction remains largely oriented towards Western centres of knowledge production, which traditionally dominate academic publishing, international university rankings, scientific citation systems and the distribution of research resources.

In this context, the focus should be on creating a reasonable alternative to Western dominance and on forming a more equitable and multipolar system of international scientific and educational cooperation, within which BRICS+ states will be able to fully realise their own intellectual potential and participate in shaping the global scientific agenda.

In this context, the BRICS Skills Excellence Centre can play a special role. Its activities already contribute to the development of cooperation among educational institutions, research organisations and employers in the states of the association. At the same time, in the future the Centre can become one of the key coordination mechanisms for forming a unified BRICS+ knowledge space.

One of the priority areas is the development of joint research programmes in strategically important fields: artificial intelligence, the digital economy, biotechnology, energy, healthcare, sustainable development and climate change. Joint scientific projects make it possible not only to pool the research resources of BRICS+ countries, but also to form stable international research teams capable of generating knowledge of global significance.

During India's Chairship, particular attention is being given to the development of educational and scientific cooperation, the digitalisation of education, support for innovation and the training of

personnel for the economy of the future. In this regard, significant potential lies in initiatives aimed at expanding academic mobility, developing network interaction among universities, strengthening cooperation between research centres, and creating new mechanisms for the exchange of knowledge and technology.

In this regard, the development of double degree programmes and the formulation of common approaches to assessing the contribution of educational organisations to the strategic objectives of BRICS acquire particular importance. A promising direction for addressing this task would be the creation of a ranking system for educational institutions in BRICS+ countries, taking into account not only academic results, but also the degree to which an educational organisation is integrated into the association's international agenda.

Unlike existing ranking systems, which are oriented primarily towards indicators of academic performance, publication activity and material and technical resources, a BRICS+ ranking of educational institutions could include indicators of international partnership, student participation in forums, summits, youth parliaments and other international events of the bloc. Particular attention should be given to assessing students' level of socio-political and socio-economic awareness of BRICS+ activities, as well as their involvement in the implementation of international projects and initiatives, which should reflect the socially significant impact of BRICS+ educational institutions.

An important criterion could be whether an educational organisation holds the status of a BRICS+ Affiliated School, participates in expert councils, develops educational tourism, prepares methodological materials and textbooks for the international pedagogical community, and implements socially significant projects aimed at popularising the values and objectives of BRICS+. Such an approach would make it possible to take into account not only educational outcomes, but also the social impact of educational institutions and their contribution to the formation of the association's international humanitarian space.

An additional area for the development of cooperation may be the formation of unified mechanisms for assessing competencies that are in demand in a multipolar world. Since national systems of final assessment differ significantly among BRICS+ states, there is a need to create a comparable international instrument for assessing learners' training. In this regard, an international certificate of transcontinental competencies should be considered a unified measure of graduates' readiness to participate in international projects, implement BRICS+ megaprojects and work in conditions of intercivilisational interaction.

The use of such instruments would make it possible to maintain a balance between national educational standards and international requirements, preserve the educational sovereignty of states, and at the same time form a comparable international framework for assessing educational outcomes within BRICS+.

No less important is the development of a system of individual educational achievements for learners within the BRICS+ space. The creation of international portfolios for school and university students, as well as the recording of their participation in scientific research, international forums, expert events, competitions and projects, will create additional mechanisms for the academic and professional mobility of young people from the states of the bloc. At the same time, this will contribute to the

formation of a new generation of young BRICS+ leaders with a high level of socio-political awareness, intercultural competence and understanding of the strategic development goals of BRICS.

Undoubtedly, in the long term, the formation of a unified BRICS+ knowledge economy will become one of the most important factors in the sustainable development of the bloc. This is not only a matter of training qualified specialists or increasing the number of scientific publications. The main task is to create an international intellectual ecosystem capable of bringing together the educational, scientific and innovation potential of BRICS+ states and ensuring their active participation in shaping the future global scientific and technological agenda.