

TEACHING ENGLISH TO PRESCHOOLERS USING PLAY-BASED METHODS

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Annotation: *This article analyzes the role of play-based methods in teaching English to preschool children. Based on established theories of child development and language acquisition, the study highlights the effectiveness of play in fostering early foreign language learning.*

Introduction

Early childhood is a critical stage for language acquisition, during which children demonstrate a strong ability to learn languages through interaction and meaningful exposure. According to Lightbown and Spada (2013), young learners acquire language more effectively when learning occurs in natural and engaging contexts. Therefore, teaching English to preschool children requires developmentally appropriate approaches rather than traditional, form-focused instruction.

Play-based learning is widely recognized as an effective pedagogical approach in early childhood education. It allows children to actively participate in learning through games, songs, movement, and imagination. This article examines the theoretical foundations of play-based learning and discusses its practical application in teaching English to preschool learners.

Theoretical Background

The significance of play in child development has been emphasized by several educational theorists. Piaget (1962) stated that children construct knowledge through active exploration of their environment, and play serves as a natural medium for cognitive development. In the context of language learning, play enables children to experiment with sounds, words, and meanings without pressure.

Vygotsky (1978) highlighted the social dimension of learning and introduced the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development. He argued that learning occurs most effectively when children receive guidance from adults or more capable peers. In play-based English instruction, teachers provide scaffolding by modeling language and supporting learners during interactive activities.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis further supports play-based language teaching. Krashen (1985) emphasized that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input in a low-anxiety environment. Play-based activities help lower the affective filter, making language input more accessible to young learners.

Practical Application of Play-Based Methods

Play-based instruction integrates language learning into meaningful classroom activities. Songs and chants, for example, are effective in developing pronunciation and vocabulary. As Cameron (2001) notes, repetition and rhythm in songs help young learners internalize new language. Songs such as "*Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes*" allow children to learn vocabulary related to body parts while engaging in physical movement.

Role-play activities also play a significant role in preschool English classrooms. Through pretend play, such as playing "shop" or "family," children practice simple communicative expressions in realistic contexts. Cameron (2001) emphasizes that role-play promotes meaningful language use rather than mechanical repetition.

Storytelling is another effective play-based technique. According to Lightbown and Spada (2013), repeated exposure to familiar language structures through stories enhances comprehension and retention. Using picture books with repetitive patterns helps children acquire basic sentence structures and vocabulary.

Movement-based games support language learning through physical action. Asher (1997) introduced Total Physical Response as an effective approach for young learners, emphasizing the connection between language and movement. Games such as "*Simon Says*" help children understand and respond to classroom instructions in English.

Classroom Environment and Teacher's Role

An effective play-based classroom should provide rich language input and a supportive atmosphere. Teachers play a crucial role in guiding play, modeling correct language use, and encouraging participation. The use of visual aids, repetition, and positive feedback helps maintain motivation and supports confidence in young learners.

Conclusion

In conclusion, play-based methods offer an effective and developmentally appropriate approach to teaching English to preschool children. Theoretical perspectives and practical classroom examples demonstrate that play supports cognitive, social, and linguistic development. Incorporating play-based strategies into preschool English instruction can significantly enhance early language acquisition.

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