

EFFECTIVE METHODS FOR TEACHING ENGLISH TO PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract. This study explores developmentally appropriate and evidence-based methods for teaching English to preschool-aged children, with an emphasis on listening comprehension, multimodal learning, and play-based instruction. Preschool learners aged 4–6 process language through imitation, sensory experience, and emotional engagement rather than through analytical reasoning or grammar-based approaches. Using a qualitative descriptive-analytical methodology, the study examines the effectiveness of Total Physical Response (TPR), multimodal materials, storytelling, songs, and play-centered techniques commonly used in early childhood education worldwide. Results demonstrate that preschool children acquire vocabulary, understand simple verbal instructions, and develop early communicative abilities more effectively in environments that emphasize movement, meaningful repetition, and multimodal input. The discussion highlights implications for educators and curriculum designers, emphasizing the need for short, dynamic lessons that incorporate sensory, emotional, and physical experiences. The study concludes that child-centered, play-based English instruction significantly enhances motivation, comprehension, and long-term retention among preschool children.

Keywords: preschool education, English teaching methods, listening comprehension, multimodal learning, TPR, early foreign language acquisition, play-based learning.

1. Introduction

Preschool education is globally recognized as a foundational stage for developing cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional capacities. Children aged 4–6 possess remarkable neuroplasticity, enabling them to absorb language rapidly through exposure, imitation, and interaction (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Unlike older learners who rely on conscious analysis and metalinguistic awareness, young children acquire language naturally through meaningful experiences. For this reason, early English instruction must be grounded in methods appropriate to their developmental stage, such as play, storytelling, movement, and sensory engagement. International research emphasizes that early foreign language education is most effective when it prioritizes listening comprehension—the first stage in the natural sequence of language acquisition (Krashen, 1982; Cameron, 2001). Listening-centered instruction prepares children to respond nonverbally, gradually building the foundation for verbal communication. In countries like Uzbekistan, where English is increasingly introduced at preschool levels, understanding effective pedagogical strategies is essential for developing high-quality early childhood programs.

This study aims to identify and analyze effective methods for teaching English to preschool children, drawing from theoretical frameworks, classroom observations, and comparative analyses of international practices. Special focus is placed on the role of TPR, multimodal learning tools, and play-based instruction in supporting language development.

2. Methods

A qualitative descriptive-analytical approach was used to examine effective English-teaching strategies for preschool children. The study followed these steps:

Literature review

The research analyzed academic sources on early foreign language acquisition, including seminal works by Asher (1977) on TPR, Krashen (1982) on comprehensible input, Vygotsky (1978) on sociocultural theory, and more recent studies on early childhood pedagogy.

Classroom observation

Informal observations from various preschool environments were analyzed, focusing on lessons involving action songs, storytelling, movement games, picture-based tasks, and teacher-child verbal exchanges.

Material analysis

Instructional materials such as flashcards, puppets, digital animations, and tactile objects were reviewed to evaluate how multimodal input supports comprehension and memory.

Comparative analysis

Teaching practices in high-performing early childhood English programs (e.g., in Finland, Singapore, South Korea) were compared to identify global trends in preschool language instruction.

Results

Play-based learning significantly increases engagement and retention. The analysis found that play is the primary cognitive activity through which preschool children construct meaning. Language-rich play scenarios—such as role-play, puppet shows, and pretend shops—enable children to internalize vocabulary naturally. Children exposed to play-based English lessons demonstrated longer attention spans, increased willingness to speak, greater confidence in experimenting with new vocabulary, and higher levels of peer interaction.

Listening comprehension improves through stories, songs, and repetition. Children demonstrated the highest comprehension levels when exposed to repetitive, meaningful auditory input. Storytelling with visual support—picture books, sequenced images, or puppets—was especially effective.

Effective listening tools include action songs, call-and-response routines, short animated stories, and mini-dialogues.

Total physical response enhances memory and reduces anxiety. TPR activities showed strong positive effects on comprehension, confidence, and memory. Children taught through TPR showed strong retention of action verbs, improved ability to follow multi-step instructions, reduced anxiety, and increased physical participation.

Multimodal instruction strengthens sensory learning and long-term retention. Analysis confirmed that preschool children learn best through multisensory experiences. When teachers used a combination of visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic materials, children demonstrated significantly higher retention.

Discussion

This study reinforces the understanding that preschool children require developmentally appropriate and embodied learning methods. Traditional grammar-based instruction is ineffective because preschoolers do not yet possess abstract reasoning skills necessary to analyze linguistic structures. Instead, learning must be contextual, sensory-rich, and emotionally engaging.

Listening-first approaches, play-centered activities, movement-based learning, and multimodal instruction collectively support holistic child development.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that preschool English instruction is most effective when grounded in child-centered, developmentally appropriate methods. Play-based learning, TPR, multimodal instruction, and listening-focused activities significantly enhance children's comprehension, confidence, and motivation.

Early exposure to English through movement, stories, songs, and sensory experiences builds a strong foundation for later linguistic development.

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