

THE FIRST STEPS IN LEARNING ENGLISH: FROM ACTIVE GAMES TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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Abstract: This article examines the methodologies and approaches to teaching English to preschool and elementary school-aged children. Emphasizing the importance of physical activity breaks and engaging lesson structures, it outlines the challenges of maintaining attention in young learners and the necessity of incorporating dynamic activities such as games, songs, and storytelling. As children progress from preschool to early elementary years, their attention spans and cognitive abilities develop, allowing for more structured learning experiences. The article also discusses the role of parents and tutors in facilitating language acquisition, highlighting the benefits of enrolling children in specialized language schools that promote social interaction and teamwork. Ultimately, the piece underscores the significance of tailored educational strategies in fostering a child's interest in the English language and enhancing their overall cognitive skills.

Keywords: English language acquisition, preschool education, elementary education, teaching methodologies, child development, attention span, physical activity, parental involvement, language schools, cognitive skills.

Early childhood is a period of rapid learning, characterized by a natural curiosity and an eagerness to absorb new information. Children at this age readily acquire their native language, demonstrating an innate capacity for language acquisition. Importantly, they are not afraid to make mistakes, allowing them to experiment freely with language. This fearlessness, coupled with their playful nature, makes early childhood an ideal time to introduce a foreign language.

Lessons are designed to be engaging and interactive, incorporating games, songs, and movement to maintain children's attention. The focus initially lies on developing listening and speaking skills, with vocabulary and basic phrases introduced before formal grammar instruction.

Various teaching methodologies are employed based on age. Infants often benefit from the Glenn Doman method, emphasizing visual learning through flashcards. For older preschoolers, project-based learning can be highly effective, fostering creativity and engagement.

Beyond language skills, learning English fosters crucial developmental benefits, including increased confidence, independence, and creativity. It cultivates critical thinking and goal-setting abilities, essential for both academic and social success.

Principles of Teaching Material to Preschoolers

To ensure that lessons are effective and do not overwhelm the child, certain principles should be followed:

1. **Voluntariness of Lessons** Children should never be forced to learn English at a young age. If lessons become a chore, they can quickly become boring, making it difficult for the child to study the language later. The main task of parents and teachers is to spark interest in the language, which can be effectively achieved through play. Through play, children explore the world and easily engage in the process, mastering important language skills without difficulty.

2. Motivation and Interest in Lessons. Children do not have the same motivation to learn English as adults do. They do not need to build a career, and they are not aware that English will be necessary for them in the future. Therefore, it is important to capture the child's interest in other ways. If the learning process is enjoyable and not exhausting, the child will naturally be eager to participate. It's essential to create your own motivation.

3. Comfort for the Child while Learning Comfort is another crucial factor in education. Some children easily remain in a group with other children and a teacher, while others may need a parent nearby. This depends on the child's age and personality. If the lessons are natural for the child, they will easily begin to grasp the material. If you notice that the child is resistant to learning, it should not be overlooked. Perhaps the method is not suitable, the teacher is not engaging, or the child may simply be overwhelmed. It is worth adjusting the approach to rekindle interest.

4. Sequence of Learning Until the age of six, there is no point in burdening children with rules, spelling, and grammar. Instead, it is beneficial to teach new words through songs, dances, and games. The key is for the material to be presented in a systematic manner, allowing new knowledge to easily build on what the child already knows.

Methods of Teaching Foreign Languages to Children

1. Associative Method This method works exceptionally well for children and their vivid imaginations. The essence is that the studied phrase or word is linked to a bright image or picture. For example, when memorizing the word "apple," they envision a juicy, delicious apple. Later, this vivid image makes it easier to recall the word.

2. Communicative Method (Lexical Approach) This method involves learning the language through communication and discussion, allowing children to gradually learn to think in English. They can discuss how their day went, how interesting a new book or movie was, or what they did over the weekend. This way, children pick up phrases and expressions that they will easily use in conversation.

3. Audio-Lingual and Audio-Visual Methods. These methods are effective for developing spoken language skills. They rely on engaging dialogues, which children practice and use to learn to speak.

4. Immersion Method. Children watch movies and listen to songs, thereby absorbing authentic English speech. A good practice is to communicate with a native speaker who cannot respond in Russian. The immersion method teaches children to think in English, a skill that will be invaluable in the future.

English for Preschoolers

In preschool, when teaching English, the primary focus is on communication. The main emphasis is on helping children understand spoken English and respond to it. At this age, the foundations of pronunciation are also established. Children use basic English words, memorize phrases from songs, and learn to recognize words through games. It is essential that the English words represent concepts that are already familiar to the children in their native language and that they easily combine with one another.

Younger children find it easiest to remember names of objects (which they can touch) and actions (which they can perform). Names of clothing, body parts, family members, greetings, toys, and animals are all suitable topics for English vocabulary at this age.

Another characteristic of information processing at this age is that children have a well-developed visual memory; therefore, words are demonstrated visually. Real objects, pictures, and toys are helpful in this regard. Creative activities such as drawing, coloring, cutting, and tracing also facilitate easier word.

A key element of the lesson often includes a physical activity break, where all exercises and actions are also referred to by their English names. Nevertheless, it can be challenging for preschoolers to sustain their focus for extended periods, so lessons generally last no longer than 30-40 minutes. Typically, classes are conducted twice a week. English lessons at this age enhance memory, attention, quick thinking, and observational skills, effectively preparing children for school.

Elementary school age is also characterized by exploration and learning about the world. During this stage, children are particularly curious and active, making it difficult for them to remain seated for long periods, which can lead to quick fatigue. Consequently, games, active tasks, poems, songs, and cartoons are frequently employed to engage younger school children. While their interest in lessons tends to be more stable, it is still crucial to structure activities in an engaging way by alternating between different tasks.

A significant aspect of this age group is the onset of academic activities. Children's attention spans increase and become more stable. By ages 7-9, they find it considerably easier to adhere to a specific program for a set duration. Their memory improves as it becomes more consciously regulated, and their drive for achievement also intensifies. They learn to set goals and attain results, which helps cultivate an interest in the English language.

Lessons can last between 40-45 minutes and may take place 2-3 times a week. Parents can certainly teach English to preschoolers or younger school children themselves, provided they have a strong command of the language to ensure proper pronunciation. They can utilize established methodologies developed by experts. However, parents may not always have the time to engage consistently with their children, and they might also lack the necessary language proficiency or teaching skills. Mastery of the language is one thing, but explaining concepts or facilitating a child's learning is another.

Hiring a tutor is a viable option, although this approach is more suited for school-aged children who need to enhance their skills. For a more structured and comfortable learning experience, it is advisable to enroll the child in a language school that offers specialized programs for children up to ages 7-9. These classes are typically conducted in groups, which fosters socialization and facilitates better language acquisition. Children not only learn English but also develop teamwork skills, guided by professionals who employ modern methodologies and stimulate the necessary interest.

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