

Early Teaching of English to Children in Preschool Educational Institutions

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Abstract. *The growing global demand for English proficiency has led to a worldwide trend of introducing English language instruction at increasingly younger ages, including preschool (3–7 years). This study examines the theoretical justification, developmental appropriateness, and practical methodological approaches for teaching English to preschool children in formal preschool educational institutions.*

Key words: *early foreign language teaching, preschool English, sensitive period, play-based learning, Total Physical Response, communicative approach, preschool education.*

Introduction

In the 21st century, English has become the dominant language of international communication, education, science, and business. This reality has significantly lowered the age at which foreign language instruction begins worldwide. Whereas second-language learning was traditionally introduced in secondary school, many countries now begin systematic English teaching in primary or even preschool settings.

Preschool age (3–7 years) is characterized by rapid cognitive, linguistic, social-emotional, and motor development. Numerous psychologists and linguists (L.S. Vygotsky, S.L. Rubinstein, T. Eliot, B. White, W. Penfield, K. Roberts, L.V. Shcherba) consider this period highly sensitive for foreign language acquisition. Children exhibit exceptional ability to imitate pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm; they lack the fear of mistakes typical of older learners; and their dominant form of activity—play—provides a natural and motivating context for 言語 learning.

The social demand for early English instruction is evident in the growing number of public and private kindergartens offering English programs, driven primarily by parental expectations. The present article aims to justify the developmental appropriateness of early English teaching in preschool institutions and to identify the most effective methodological approaches for this age group.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative literature review methodology. Sources include:

- International literature on early second-language acquisition and methodology (Asher, Larsen-Freeman).

Analysis focuses on three key areas:

1. Age-related psychological and physiological characteristics of preschool children.
2. Theoretical foundations of early foreign language acquisition.
3. Comparison of methodological approaches suitable (and unsuitable) for children aged 3–7.

Results

1. Developmental Justification for Early English Teaching

- The sensitive period for language acquisition is most commonly identified as 1.5–8 years (Eliot) or 4–8 years (Penfield & Roberts).
- Preschool children possess high brain plasticity, excellent auditory discrimination, and strong imitative abilities, enabling near-native pronunciation.
- Absence of a psychological “language barrier” and fear of mistakes facilitates spontaneous speech production.
- Play remains the leading activity (Vygotsky, Elkonin), providing intrinsic motivation and emotional engagement.
- Early exposure develops cognitive processes (attention, memory, imagination, analysis, generalization) and broadens cultural horizons.

2. Key Differences Between Child and Adult Language Learning

- Children are still forming cognitive structures and native-language mastery.
- Motivation is predominantly intrinsic and play-oriented rather than instrumental.
- Reading and writing skills in the native language are absent or emerging (especially before age 6–7).
- Attention span is short (10–15 minutes maximum), requiring frequent changes of activity and incorporation of movement.

3. Most Effective Methodological Approaches for Preschool English

The following approaches and methods proved most appropriate for 3–7-year-olds:

Approach/Method	Core Principles	Suitability for Preschool
Total Physical Response (TPR)	Understanding through physical response to verbal commands; delayed speech production	Extremely high (Asher, 2012)
Natural Approach	Imitates L1 acquisition; comprehension precedes production; rich input via context	Very high
Play-based methods	All language material introduced and practiced through games, songs, movement	Essential
Communicative Approach (adapted)	Focus on meaningful interaction; error tolerance	High (with strong play element)
Audiolingual Method	Repetition and pattern drills	Moderate (can become mechanical)
Grammar-Translation Method	Grammar rules + translation	Not suitable
Lexical Approach	Learning through chunks and collocations	Limited suitability

4. Practical Recommendations

- Prioritize listening and speaking; postpone literacy until age 6–7.
- Use visualization (pictures, toys) and action-linked language.
- Maintain lesson segments of 5–10 minutes with frequent physical activity breaks.
- Employ songs, rhymes, finger plays, TPR stories, puppetry, and dramatization.
- Create a positive emotional atmosphere; praise effort rather than accuracy.
- Integrate English into daily routines (greetings, transitions, snack time).

Discussion

Early introduction of English in preschool does not interfere with native-language development when conducted appropriately. On the contrary, it enhances overall cognitive and linguistic flexibility. The main challenge lies not in children's ability but in teacher preparation: instructors must combine high English proficiency with deep understanding of preschool pedagogy and child psychology.

The play-based, movement-rich approaches (especially TPR and Natural Approach) align perfectly with the developmental needs and leading activity of preschool children, making English classes both effective and joyful.

Conclusion

Teaching English to preschool children in formal educational institutions is psychologically and pedagogically justified during the sensitive period of 3–7 years. When lessons are organized through play, movement, visualization, and short varied activities—using primarily Total Physical Response, Natural, and adapted Communicative approaches—children acquire foundational listening and speaking skills naturally, develop positive attitudes toward language learning, and gain cognitive and sociocultural benefits that will support their future academic success.

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