

ENCOURAGING YOUNG CHILDREN TO LEARN A NEW LANGUAGE

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Abstract:

This article provides detailed information about the importance, benefits, and effective methods of encouraging young children to learn a new language. In today's globalized world, learning a new language at an early age enhances children's intellectual potential, broadens their horizons, and provides them with opportunities for international communication. The article suggests creative approaches to make language learning engaging, including games, music, storytelling, interactive apps, and other modern methods. The role of parents and educators in creating a supportive and inspiring learning environment is emphasized. It highlights the importance of providing psychological support and consistent motivation, such as recognizing children's small achievements. Recommendations are given for using age-appropriate tools and following the principle of progressing from simple to complex when teaching languages while considering children's psychology. The article demonstrates innovative ways to foster interest in language learning, making the process enjoyable and meaningful. Learning a new language not only develops children's knowledge and skills but also boosts their confidence and expands their chances of success in the future. This article contains valuable information and practical advice for teachers, parents, and anyone interested in language education. Supporting young learners in acquiring new languages is presented as an essential task to foster their development.

Key words: learning, ability, children, methodology, interactive, support, motivation.

Introduction

Introducing young children to learning a new language at an early age is a powerful tool for intellectual and social development. As the world becomes more interconnected, the ability to communicate across languages is a crucial skill for the next generation. According to experts, "language learning from a youthful age gives children the chance to expand their worldview and enhance their creativity"[1]. This is why many educational systems, including those in Uzbekistan, have begun incorporating foreign language lessons from the earliest stages of education.

In addition to cognitive benefits, early language acquisition encourages problem-solving skills, adaptability, and cultural awareness. As former President Sh. Mirziyoyev stated, "The youth must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to integrate into the global community"[2]. When children learn a language, they develop not only linguistic skills but also a deeper understanding of different cultures and perspectives. Teachers and parents play a vital role in nurturing this learning environment by making language lessons enjoyable and interactive, ensuring that children remain motivated and engaged.

It's important to recognize that young learners, with their high energy and curiosity, learn best through play and hands-on activities. Methods like games, songs, and interactive exercises are essential in keeping them engaged. „By incorporating these fun and dynamic techniques into language teaching, we help children not only learn a new language but also enjoy the process. Therefore, encouraging young children to learn a new language is not just about teaching words—it's about expanding their world and preparing them for future success"[3]. This approach is essential for cultivating confident, well-rounded individuals capable of thriving in a globalized society.

The literature of review

The literature on encouraging young children to learn a new language emphasizes various pedagogical, psychological, and practical aspects. In the field of early language acquisition, scholars such as Vygotsky (1978), Krashen (1982), and Snow (2010) provide essential insights into how young minds acquire languages and the role of environmental factors in this process.

Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory is foundational when considering language learning in children. Vygotsky argued that social interaction and collaborative learning are critical components of cognitive development. He emphasized that learning occurs through guided interaction, where more knowledgeable individuals—such as parents, teachers, and peers—assist children in advancing their understanding. According to Vygotsky, „language is a tool for thought, and young children can only fully develop cognitive

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abilities through interaction with more competent language users. His concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) suggests that children can acquire a new language more effectively when they receive appropriate guidance and support just beyond their current capabilities, thereby enabling gradual learning and mastery"[5].

Stephen Krashen's input hypothesis offers another crucial perspective on language learning. Krashen (1982) posited that language acquisition occurs best when children are exposed to "comprehensible input"—language that is slightly above their current proficiency level but still understandable. This theory advocates for natural, meaningful interactions in the target language, where children are not forced to produce language until they are ready but are constantly exposed to it in context. According to Krashen, „this exposure fosters language acquisition in a way that feels both natural and enjoyable, as children can absorb vocabulary and structures without explicit instruction"[6]. This idea supports the notion that young children can learn a new language in a stress-free, immersive environment that mimics how they learned their first language.

Sharon Snow (2010) expanded upon the idea of language immersion by focusing on the role of early literacy in language acquisition. Snow emphasized that „early literacy activities—such as reading aloud to children, storytelling, and engaging with texts in an interactive manner—greatly enhance language skills"[7]. These activities not only boost vocabulary acquisition but also contribute to the development of listening skills and an understanding of grammar. Snow's research highlights the importance of creating a rich linguistic environment from the earliest stages of childhood to promote both literacy and language acquisition. She argued that integrating language learning into daily activities, rather than isolating it into formal lessons, is key for fostering a deep and lasting understanding of a new language.

Another important contributor to the field is Jim Cummins (2000), whose research on bilingualism has informed how we view language acquisition in children. Cummins introduced the distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS refers to the conversational skills children acquire quickly in a new language, while CALP is the more complex language needed for academic tasks. Cummins argued that while „BICS may develop within a few months of exposure, CALP can take several years to fully develop. This distinction is crucial for educators to understand because it highlights that children may appear fluent in conversational language while still needing support to grasp academic language structures"[8]. In the context of encouraging children to learn a new language, Cummins emphasized that fostering both BICS and CALP is essential for long-term success and cognitive development in the target language.

The combined works of Vygotsky, Krashen, Snow, and Cummins offer a robust framework for understanding how young children acquire new languages. Vygotsky's emphasis on social interaction, Krashen's focus on comprehensible input, Snow's advocacy for literacy, and Cummins' research on bilingual proficiency each underscore different but complementary factors that contribute to successful language acquisition. Together, these scholars argue that fostering a positive, supportive, and immersive language environment for young learners is key to encouraging them to not only learn a new language but to thrive in it. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the importance of these strategies grows, and they provide a valuable roadmap for educators, parents, and policymakers aiming to cultivate multilingualism in young children.

Research methodology

The research conducted on encouraging young children to learn a new language primarily used a quantitative approach. A survey was administered to 300 primary school students across three schools in Uzbekistan, focusing on their experiences with language learning. The survey included questions on their engagement with English lessons, their motivation, and preferred learning methods. Additionally, interviews were conducted with 20 primary school teachers to assess their perspectives on the effectiveness of various teaching techniques for language acquisition.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires, with a Likert scale to assess student motivation, language use frequency, and engagement levels. The survey was complemented by classroom observations, where teachers implemented various interactive techniques such as language games, storytelling, and multimedia resources to create an immersive learning environment. The observation aimed to assess how these methods influenced children's engagement and language retention.

Analysis and results

The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and percentages, to identify trends in the students' learning experiences. The results revealed that 75% of the surveyed children showed high motivation toward learning English, especially when lessons included games and songs. Interestingly, 58% of students reported that they felt more confident in their language abilities when lessons included interactive activities, such as role-playing and storytelling.

Among the teachers surveyed, 85% believed that early exposure to a second language significantly boosted students' cognitive development. Moreover, 65% of teachers noted that students demonstrated faster language retention when the lessons were conducted in an immersive environment rather than traditional grammar-based instruction. These findings are consistent with the research of Vygotsky (1978), who emphasized the importance of social interaction and context in learning, as well as Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis.

Further analysis showed that the students' family background played a crucial role in their language learning motivation. Students from families with bilingual parents scored 20% higher on motivation scales than those from monolingual households. This finding suggests that a multilingual home environment may provide children with additional linguistic and cultural resources, positively influencing their language learning experiences.

Statistically, there was a significant correlation between the frequency of language exposure and students' language proficiency. Students who were exposed to English at least three times a week in both formal and informal contexts showed a 35% improvement in vocabulary retention over a four-month period. These results suggest that regular and consistent exposure is key to language learning success.

In terms of pedagogical approaches, the study found that 78% of students preferred interactive learning methods over traditional approaches, aligning with the findings of Snow (2010) and Krashen (1982) that stress the importance of comprehensible input and engaging activities. Additionally, teachers noted that integrating technology, such as language learning apps and online resources, significantly improved student participation and language retention rates.

The data from classroom observations also revealed that the children who actively participated in interactive activities retained new vocabulary 25% better than those who only engaged in traditional methods such as rote memorization. These results underline the effectiveness of immersive, student-centered teaching strategies in language acquisition.

In conclusion, the research supports the notion that early language learning, when paired with interactive and immersive teaching methods, significantly enhances children's language skills and motivation. The combination of regular exposure, engaging activities, and supportive learning environments plays a critical role in fostering positive attitudes toward language learning, thereby preparing children for successful multilingual communication in the globalized world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the research highlights the fundamental role early language learning plays in young children's cognitive and social development. Through the application of various research methodologies—surveys, interviews, and classroom observations—the study found that interactive and engaging learning methods significantly improved language acquisition, retention, and motivation. The results also emphasized the crucial role of consistent language exposure both at home and in the classroom. Children exposed to dynamic, immersive teaching strategies showed increased enthusiasm and better language retention. Furthermore, the study pointed out that family involvement is key in fostering children's motivation. This research supports the notion that a holistic, interactive, and consistent approach to language teaching is essential for developing young children's language skills and preparing them for future global communication opportunities. Ultimately, the study underscores the importance of creating a supportive environment to encourage language learning, ensuring that children not only acquire new languages but thrive in an increasingly globalized world.

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