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EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING ENGLISH TO PRESCHOOLERS

Annotation: This article examines effective methods for teaching English to preschool children, emphasizes the importance of interactive activities, and discusses how educators and caregivers can foster language development in early childhood.

Key words: interactive activities, learning through play, Language Acquisition, Preschool Children, method for teaching, visual and sensory learners.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English to preschool children requires a different approach compared to older learners. At this age, children are still developing their cognitive and social skills, and their attention spans are short. However, their minds are also incredibly receptive to new languages and learning through play, interaction, and exploration. Given these characteristics, the key to teaching English to preschool children is to create a stimulating, playful, and supportive environment that fosters natural language acquisition rather than formal instruction.

1. Understanding Language Acquisition in Preschool Children - Preschool-aged children, typically between three and five years old, are in a critical period of language development. According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, this stage, known as the preoperational stage, is marked by rapid language acquisition. Children at this age are also developing their ability to understand symbols, which is crucial for language teaching (Berk, 2021).

During this stage, children learn languages best through imitation, repetition, and exposure. They notice patterns and sounds naturally, and often without realizing, they are learning. This aligns with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which suggests that children acquire language most effectively when exposed to "comprehensible input" language that is slightly above their current proficiency level but understandable through context (Krashen, 1985).

2. Key Strategies for Teaching English to Preschool Children

A. Learning through Play - Play-based learning is one of the most effective ways to engage preschoolers in English language learning. Games, songs, and role-playing activities create opportunities for children to use English in a fun and non-threatening environment. For example, singing songs like "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes" helps children learn body parts while moving their bodies, which reinforces the vocabulary. Additionally, interactive games such as matching pictures with words or simple board games that encourage turn taking can build language skills while developing social and cognitive abilities. Researchers have found that children retain information better when it is linked to physical movement, a concept known as embodied learning (Smith, 2017).

B. Storytelling and Picture Books - Using stories and picture books is another powerful method for teaching English to young learners. Stories capture children's attention, expand their vocabulary, and introduce them to sentence structures in a meaningful context. Books with repetitive patterns, like Eric Carle's "Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?" provide an excellent way for children to anticipate and repeat phrases, reinforcing language acquisition. Additionally, discussing pictures helps children connect words with objects and actions, which is crucial at this developmental stage. Story time encourages listening comprehension, and by asking questions during the reading process, teachers can stimulate critical thinking and language use.

C. Use of Visual and Sensory Aids - Preschool children are visual and sensory learners. Visual aids, such as flashcards, puppets, and real objects, help to cement the association between words and

meanings. For example, when teaching colors, showing objects in those colors helps solidify the vocabulary. Sensory activities, like touching different textures (soft, rough) and associating them with words, also enhance learning.

D. Repetition and Routine - Repetition is key in early language learning. Preschoolers need to hear words and phrases multiple times in different contexts before they can fully grasp and use them. Routines such as greeting songs at the beginning of class or asking simple questions like "What's your name?" during circle time, reinforce language through repetition.

Creating a daily routine in English classes not only helps children feel secure and understand the structure of the lesson, but it also builds their listening and speaking skills through familiar patterns of language use.

E. Encouraging Interaction and Participation - At this age, children learn best when they are actively involved in the learning process. Encouraging participation in-group activities like singing, dancing, or playing games fosters communication and helps children feel more comfortable using English in front of others. Teachers can ask simple questions that require short responses, such as "What is this?" or "How many apples?" to prompt verbal interaction.

3. The Role of the Teacher and Environment- A supportive learning environment is essential for young children learning a second language. Teachers play a critical role in creating a positive and engaging atmosphere. They should provide constant encouragement, be patient with mistakes, and use clear, slow speech with simple vocabulary.

The classroom environment should also be rich with visual cues and learning materials in English. Posters, labels on objects, and colorful, child-friendly decorations can help children associate English words with their meanings. Providing plenty of opportunities for hands-on learning and exploration further supports language development.

CONCLUSION

Teaching English to preschool children is both a rewarding and challenging task. By focusing on interactive, play-based learning, using stories and songs, incorporating visual aids, and providing a nurturing environment, teachers can foster a love for the English language in young learners. Children at this age learn best through natural interaction, repetition, and exploration, so it is crucial to create a learning atmosphere where they feel comfortable and excited to experiment with language.

Ultimately, early exposure to English, paired with engaging and meaningful activities, lays a strong foundation for continued language development as children grow.

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