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METHODS FOR DEVELOPING SPEECH IN PRESCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN AND IDENTIFYING SPEECH DIFFICULTIES

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Abstract. This article examines pedagogical aspects of developing coherent and figurative speech in preschool children. The role of fiction, folklore, proverbs, sayings, phraseological units, riddles and creative tasks in children's speech development is analyzed. A system of diagnostic tasks aimed at identifying early speech difficulties and assessing children's ability to construct independent narratives, comprehend literary texts and understand figurative means of expression is proposed. Criteria for assessing speech development at high, medium and low levels are also presented. The article substantiates the importance of cooperation between families and preschool educational organizations in supporting children's speech development.

Keywords: preschool education, children's speech, coherent speech, figurative speech, speech development, diagnostics, phraseological units, proverbs, riddles, fiction, parents, pedagogical cooperation.

Introduction. In recent years, research into language acquisition during the preschool years and throughout the human lifespan has gained considerable momentum. This is because language is one of the most important means of human communication, enabling individuals to express their thoughts, emotions, and aspirations, while also playing a fundamental role in the development of thinking.

Children's speech development is primarily associated with their everyday communication experiences. Children acquire language skills by listening to adults, answering questions, expressing their own thoughts, and describing events and phenomena. In this regard, the linguistic environment within the family, the way parents communicate with their children, the content of their conversations, and the language patterns they provide serve as important factors in children's speech development.

Adult speech plays a crucial role in children's speech development, as it serves as a model for children to emulate. According to specialists, children acquire language naturally and spontaneously, without excessive effort. Researchers attribute children's language and speech development to the physiological maturation of the central nervous system and its high degree of plasticity during this developmental period [2].

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During the preschool years, the lexical, grammatical, phonetic, and intonational aspects of speech gradually develop. At the same time, children progressively acquire the ability to produce coherent and connected speech. They learn to recount events in chronological order, describe objects and phenomena, provide complete answers to questions, express cause-and-effect relationships, and construct narratives independently. The successful development of these skills has a direct impact on children's subsequent educational activities.

Literature Review. The development of speech in preschool-aged children is regarded as one of the key areas of pedagogy and preschool education methodology. In her textbook Theory and Methodology of Speech Development, D. R. Babaeva provides a comprehensive discussion of the key areas, forms, tools, and methods involved in promoting speech development in preschool-aged children [4].

Speech development methodology examines the pedagogical activities aimed at enabling children to acquire their mother tongue, develop communication skills, and express their thoughts through speech [6].

The successful development of cognitive communication and speech skills in preschool-aged children is an essential prerequisite for addressing issues related to their intellectual, artistic, and speech education during this critical period of development. The more actively children develop coherent speech, the more confidently and freely they are able to use it. Children who have well-developed oral communication skills encounter fewer difficulties when speaking freely, thinking independently, asking questions, and drawing conclusions [1].

The use of literary works and examples of oral folk literature is also regarded as an important means of promoting children's speech development. Fairy tales, stories, poems, proverbs, sayings, riddles, and other folklore genres not only enrich children's vocabulary but also contribute to the development of their imaginative thinking and expressive speech.

In recent years, the content of the Ilk Qadam (First Step) State Curriculum has also undergone continuous improvement. The updates introduced into the curriculum are aimed at organizing the preschool education process in accordance with modern requirements [7].

Content of the Diagnostic Tasks

The first area — Independent Story or Fairy Tale Composition**.** Children are invited to compose a story or fairy tale on a topic of their own choice. They are given the opportunity to choose a title, narrate events in a logical sequence, and bring the story to a conclusion. The assessment focuses on their ability to develop the chosen topic, maintain a coherent sequence of events, structure the narrative into an introduction, a main body, and a conclusion, and use figurative language.

The second area — Comprehension of Literary Texts. Children are read a poem, story, or fairy tale appropriate to their age. They are then asked questions about the genre, theme, characters, and main content of the text. Their ability to understand figurative language devices, such as epithets, similes, and metaphors, is also assessed.

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The third area — Understanding Phraseological Units. Children are presented with phraseological expressions such as “qo‘yon yurak” (a timid person, literally “rabbit-hearted”), “tumshug‘ini osmoq” (to look dejected, literally “to hang one’s nose”), “jon halakda” (to be in great distress or make desperate efforts), and “peshona teri bilan” (through hard work, literally “with the sweat of one’s brow”). Their understanding of these expressions is first assessed in isolation and then in the context of specific sentences or situations. The assessment examines whether children can distinguish between literal and figurative meanings and use the expressions appropriately in relevant contexts.

The fourth area — Understanding Proverbs and Sayings. Children are presented with age-appropriate proverbs and asked to explain their meanings and provide examples of real-life situations to which they apply. This task assesses their ability to understand the generalizing meaning of proverbs and relate them to specific situations.

The fifth area — Comprehension of Figurative Meaning in Riddles. Children are read several riddles and invited not only to identify the answers but also to explain the figurative language used in them. For example, they are asked what an object or animal is compared to, which characteristics are used to describe it, and why a particular image has been chosen [3].

Methods for Overcoming Speech Difficulties

Addressing speech difficulties identified in preschool-aged children should be organized systematically, purposefully, and on the basis of an individualized approach. It is essential to take into account each child’s age, level of speech development, interests, and individual abilities. Rather than viewing speech difficulties solely as deficiencies, it is more effective to regard them as opportunities for additional pedagogical support and further development.

In the process of speech development, it is important to actively engage children in conversations, ask open-ended questions, encourage independent thinking, and give them opportunities to elaborate on their answers. Instead of correcting a child’s response immediately, the teacher can model the appropriate linguistic form by naturally repeating the correct expression. This approach helps preserve children’s confidence in communication and encourages them to participate more actively in conversations.

The Use of Literary Works

Literary works are among the most effective means of promoting speech development in preschool-aged children. Through fairy tales, stories, poems, and other literary works, children acquire new vocabulary, become familiar with sentence structures, learn to evaluate characters’ actions, and develop the ability to recount events in chronological order.

Rather than limiting the activity to simply reading a text aloud, it is advisable to organize a discussion afterward. For example, questions such as “Why did the character act this way?”, “What might happen next?”, and “What would you do if you were in the character’s place?” stimulate children’s thinking and encourage the development of coherent speech.

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Other effective methods include retelling literary texts, recounting their content with the help of pictures, speaking from the characters' perspectives, and inventing alternative endings to stories.

The Use of Proverbs, Sayings, and Phraseological Expressions

The use of folklore as a resource for developing figurative speech is of particular importance. Proverbs and sayings teach children to understand general ideas expressed in a concise form. Associating these expressions with specific real-life situations helps children develop a deeper understanding of their meaning.

When working with phraseological units, their meanings should first be explained through situations that are familiar and understandable to children. For example, the Uzbek expression "tumshug'ini osmoq" (literally, "to hang one's nose") does not refer directly to a body part; rather, it means "to feel sad" or "to look dejected." This meaning can be explained through simple, illustrative examples. Subsequently, children should be encouraged to use the expression independently in their own sentences [3].

Such exercises develop children's ability to understand figurative meanings, select expressions appropriate to a given situation, and communicate their thoughts in a more expressive and effective manner.

Riddles and Creative Activities

The use of riddles contributes to the development of children's observational skills, analytical thinking, and imaginative abilities. Beyond simply identifying the answers to riddles, explaining the clues they contain and discussing why an object is described in a particular way encourage children to engage in active thinking.

Creative tasks are equally important. For example, children may be presented with several pictures and asked to create a story based on them, give the story a title, imagine how the events might continue, or invent a new story featuring familiar fairy-tale characters. Such activities not only foster the development of independent speech but also stimulate children's creative thinking.

Cooperation Between Families and Preschool Education Institutions

Children's speech development should not be limited to activities conducted within preschool education institutions. Since children spend a considerable part of their day with their families, parental involvement in speech development and language education is of particular importance.

Within the family, regular conversations between parents and children, patiently answering children's questions, reading books aloud to them, looking at pictures together, and discussing everyday events create a natural environment conducive to speech development. In this process, it is essential to follow key pedagogical principles, such as allowing children to finish speaking without interruption, avoiding ridicule, and ensuring that they are not intimidated by their mistakes [3].

Parents' own speech also has a significant influence on children's language development. When adults communicate respectfully with one another, adhere to the norms of standard language, and

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listen attentively to children's opinions, they positively contribute to the development of children's speech culture.

Preschool education institutions, in turn, should provide parents with practical recommendations on how to support their children's speech development. To this end, parent meetings, individual consultations, training sessions, seminars, and advisory sessions can be organized.

Conclusion

The preschool period is one of the most important stages in a child's speech development. During this period, vocabulary, grammatical structures, coherent speech, the ability to express thoughts in a logical sequence, and the expressive features of speech develop actively. Therefore, a comprehensive and systematic approach to speech development is essential in preschool education.

Overall, fostering speech development in preschool-aged children is not merely a collection of isolated activities but a continuous process that encompasses assessment, developmental education, the use of literary works, free communication, family education, and pedagogical collaboration. The implementation of the Ilk Qadam (First Step) curriculum [7] within Uzbekistan's preschool education system further reinforces an approach aimed at promoting children's development in a comprehensive and integrated manner.

Therefore, the early identification of children's speech abilities and the organization of individualized developmental interventions based on their identified needs can be regarded as one of the key priorities in improving the quality of preschool education.

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