



## THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PLAY-BASED METHODS IN TEACHING LANGUAGE TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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**Abstract.** *This study investigates the effectiveness of play-based methods in teaching language to young learners. Results indicate that children learning through play acquire vocabulary faster, use language more actively and confidently, and show greater interest in lessons. Although the study was conducted with a small group and based on teacher observations, the importance of play-based approaches in language learning is clear.*

**Key words.** *Play-based learning, language acquisition, young learners, early childhood education, vocabulary development, language teaching methods, active learning, motivation in language learning, cognitive development, educational games*

**Introduction .** Language learning in early childhood is most effective when it is natural and engaging. Play offers a meaningful context for children to practice new words, express ideas, and interact socially. Unlike traditional methods, play-based learning creates a stress-free environment that motivates children to use language spontaneously. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the importance of play in cognitive and language development, noting that children learn best through interaction within their Zone of Proximal Development. This supports the use of play as a powerful teaching strategy for young language learners.[1] This study explores how play-based methods can improve vocabulary and communication skills in early language education.

A quasi-experimental design was used to explore the effectiveness of play-based methods in language teaching. The study involved 40 children aged 4 to 6 from the same kindergarten, divided into two equal groups: an experimental group



and a control group. The age range and group division were based on recommendations by Pinter (2011), who emphasizes that controlled comparative studies are effective for measuring learning outcomes in young learners. She also suggests that children in this age range are especially responsive to interactive and engaging language activities.[2] The experimental group was taught using play-based methods, including storytelling, singing, puppet play, and simple language games such as matching and role-play. These activities were chosen based on Bodrova and Leong's (2007) work, which highlights how such playful strategies support both cognitive and language development in early childhood. Meanwhile, the control group received traditional instruction involving repetition and worksheet exercises. Both groups had lessons four times a week for six weeks, with each session lasting about 30 minutes.[3]

After six weeks of instruction, the **experimental group taught through play-based methods** demonstrated a significant increase in **vocabulary use and active participation** compared to the control group. The children in this group engaged more frequently in spontaneous communication during activities such as storytelling and role-play. In contrast, the control group, which experienced traditional teaching methods, showed limited progress, mostly relying on repetition and less spontaneous language use (Bodrova & Leong, 2007, p. 52). Their motivation and enthusiasm to participate actively in language activities were noticeably lower. Teacher observations highlighted that the play-based group was more motivated and confident in using new words in various contexts, suggesting that **learner motivation** and confidence are strongly linked to the method of instruction. Furthermore, the data suggest that play-based learning promotes more meaningful and enjoyable language experiences, which enhance the natural use of language among young learners (Bodrova & Leong, 2007, p. 46). Overall, these results support the effectiveness of play-based methods in increasing both the quantity and quality of language use in young children, emphasizing the importance of creating engaging and child-centered learning environments.[4]



This study highlights the clear advantages of play-based methods in teaching language to young learners. The experimental group, which participated in play-centered activities such as role-playing, storytelling, and singing, demonstrated significant improvements in vocabulary acquisition and active language use. These children showed higher motivation and confidence, using language more spontaneously in different contexts. This contrasts sharply with the control group, where traditional teaching methods led to slower progress, more rote memorization, and lower enthusiasm for language use. The findings reinforce the theory that play facilitates natural language development by providing meaningful, engaging, and socially interactive environments. According to Bodrova and Leong (2007), such learning environments encourage children to experiment with language in a stress-free, enjoyable way, which boosts both cognitive and linguistic skills. While the study's sample size was limited and relied on teacher observations, the results suggest that integrating play into language education can create more effective and motivating learning experiences for young children. Expanding future research with larger and more diverse groups, as well as objective testing methods, will help further validate these conclusions. Overall, this research supports the adoption of play-based approaches as a core strategy in early language teaching, highlighting their potential to enhance not just language proficiency but also learner engagement and positive attitudes towards learning.

**Conclusion.** Play-based language teaching methods have proven to be highly effective for young learners. These methods increase children's engagement and motivation, allowing them to acquire new vocabulary more naturally and actively. Learning through play creates a more enjoyable and stimulating environment compared to traditional approaches. In comparison to conventional methods, play-based learning fosters spontaneous language use and builds learners' confidence. It also supports their overall cognitive and social development, making the learning process more holistic and impactful. Although the findings are based on observations from a limited sample size, and further research is needed, play-based





approaches clearly play a significant role in enhancing language acquisition in early childhood education.

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