

THE IMPORTANCE OF A PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACH IN TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TO YOUNG CHILDREN

Ismoilova Gulyora Murodjon qizi

Chirchik State Pedagogical University,

Tourism Faculty, student

e-mail: guliyoraganijonova@gmail.com

Scientific advisor: Aminova Sohila Abduhalimovna

e-mail: Aminovasohila@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: Teaching English to young children requires more than linguistic methods; it necessitates a psychological approach that considers cognitive development, emotional engagement, and motivation. This article explores how psychological theories, such as Piaget's cognitive development stages and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, influence language learning. It also highlights the importance of creating a supportive, engaging, and child-centered learning environment. By integrating psychological principles, educators can enhance children's language acquisition, boost confidence, and foster long-term interest in learning English. Practical applications, such as play-based learning, scaffolding, and multisensory teaching methods, are also discussed.

Keywords: Psychological approach, cognitive development, language acquisition, motivation, early childhood education, socio-cultural theory, scaffolding, interactive learning.

INTRODUCTION:

The early years of a child's life are crucial for cognitive and linguistic development. Research suggests that children learn best when teaching methods align with their psychological and developmental needs (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Unlike adults, young learners acquire language naturally through interaction, play, and social experiences rather than through formal instruction (Krashen, 1982).

By incorporating psychological principles into teaching, educators can create a more effective and engaging learning environment. This article discusses the role of psychology in teaching English to young children, emphasizing cognitive development, motivation, and emotional well-being. It also explores practical strategies such as play-based learning, scaffolding, and multisensory teaching to enhance language acquisition.

2. Cognitive Development and Language Learning

2.1 Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory

Jean Piaget's (1952) theory of cognitive development outlines different stages that influence how children process information. Young children, typically in the preoperational stage (ages 2–7), learn best through concrete experiences rather than abstract concepts.

For example, instead of explaining grammatical rules, teachers should use visual aids, storytelling, and role-playing to introduce new vocabulary and sentence structures. Activities like matching pictures with words or using puppets to act out simple dialogues help children grasp language more naturally.

2.2 Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory

Lev Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the importance of social interaction in learning. His Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) suggests that children learn best when they receive scaffolding—support from a teacher or peer to perform tasks slightly beyond their independent ability.

For instance, when teaching new words, a teacher can first model their usage in a sentence, then encourage students to repeat, and finally allow them to use the words independently in a role-play or conversation. This gradual release of responsibility fosters confidence and mastery.¹

3. Motivation and Emotional Engagement

3.1 The Role of Motivation in Language Learning

Motivation plays a key role in language acquisition. According to Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (1985), intrinsic motivation (learning for enjoyment) is more effective than extrinsic motivation (learning for rewards).

To foster intrinsic motivation, teachers can:

Incorporate games and storytelling that make learning fun.

Use songs, rhymes, and interactive activities to maintain engagement.

Encourage self-expression by allowing children to create their own sentences and stories.

3.2 Emotional Factors in Language Learning

Anxiety and self-confidence significantly impact language learning. A psychologically supportive environment that encourages positive reinforcement and reduces fear of failure enhances participation and retention (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

¹ Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior. Springer Science & Business Media.(1985)

For example, instead of correcting mistakes harshly, teachers should rephrase students' errors correctly and encourage them to try again. Simple praise like "Great effort!" or "That's a creative answer!" helps build confidence.²

4. Practical Strategies for Teaching English

4.1 Interactive and Play-Based Learning

Children learn best through play. Play-based learning includes:
 Role-playing (e.g., pretending to be shopkeepers, doctors, or animals).
 Storytelling (e.g., teachers and students acting out simple stories together).
 Games (e.g., Simon Says, flashcard matching, or "I Spy" with new vocabulary).
 These methods keep children engaged and reinforce language naturally.

4.2 Multisensory Learning

Using multiple senses enhances memory and engagement. Effective multisensory techniques include:
 Flashcards (visual and verbal learning).
 Action-based activities (e.g., clapping or jumping when hearing a certain word).
 Music and rhythm (e.g., singing songs with target vocabulary).
 These techniques cater to different learning styles and help children retain new words more effectively.

4.3 Scaffolding and Personalized Learning

Each child has a unique learning style and pace. Scaffolding allows teachers to gradually increase the difficulty of tasks based on individual needs (Vygotsky, 1978). For example, a child learning new sentence structures can first:

1. Listen to the teacher use it in context.
2. Repeat the sentence with visual support (pictures or gestures).
3. Create their own sentence using a guided prompt.
4. Use the structure independently in a conversation or storytelling activity.³

This step-by-step approach builds confidence and ensures deep learning.

CONCLUSION

A psychological approach in teaching English to young children enhances learning by considering cognitive development, motivation, and emotional factors. By applying theories from Piaget, Vygotsky, and modern motivation studies, educators

² Krashen, S. D. Principles and practice in second language acquisition. Pergamon Press.(1982)

³ Lightbown, P. M., & Spada, N. How languages are learned (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.(2013)

can create an engaging and supportive environment that fosters effective language acquisition.

Practical strategies such as play-based learning, scaffolding, and multisensory teaching not only improve language skills but also make the learning process enjoyable. By prioritizing psychological principles in language education, teachers can boost children's confidence, encourage long-term interest, and enhance overall academic success. Incorporating a psychological approach in teaching English to young children is essential for fostering a supportive and effective learning environment. Language acquisition at an early age is deeply influenced by cognitive development, emotional engagement, and social interactions. By understanding children's psychological needs, educators can tailor their teaching strategies to enhance motivation, retention, and overall language proficiency.

One of the key benefits of a psychological approach is its emphasis on creating a stress-free and encouraging atmosphere. Young learners tend to absorb new information more efficiently when they feel comfortable and confident. Using positive reinforcement, interactive activities, and personalized instruction helps build their self-esteem and enthusiasm for learning. Moreover, considering children's individual learning styles—whether they are visual, auditory, or kinesthetic learners—allows teachers to customize lessons for maximum impact.

Additionally, social interaction plays a crucial role in language acquisition. Encouraging group activities, peer collaboration, and communication-based exercises helps young learners practice English in natural contexts. Emotional intelligence also contributes to effective language learning; when teachers foster empathy, patience, and emotional support, students develop stronger connections with the language and feel more motivated to express themselves.

In conclusion, a psychological approach in teaching English to young children is not just beneficial—it is necessary for optimizing their learning experience. By understanding cognitive and emotional development, adapting teaching methods, and fostering a positive environment, educators can significantly improve language acquisition. This approach ensures that children not only learn English efficiently but also develop a lifelong appreciation for the language and its communicative power.

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