



Original Contribution

**A LINGUA-DIDACTIC MODEL FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE
EDUCATION OF PRESCHOOL AGE CHILDREN**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present scientific research is to clarify the specific character of the early foreign language education of preschool age children in theoretical and practical aspects. The suggested lingua-didactic model, using game activities and designed for introducing French language to children aged 5-7, is in accordance with both the psycho-physiological peculiarities of this age range and the programme of the instructive-educational activities in the kindergarten. The model possesses the following characteristics: universality, adaptability, efficiency and could be applied in a global plan to learn foreign languages.

Key words: early foreign language education, sensibility, multifunctional approach, activity approach, communicative method, general methodological base of the education of mother and foreign language, game activities, pedagogical interactions

INTRODUCTION

The exposure of Bulgarian educational system to global changes also includes change of priorities in the area of foreign languages teaching. Active communication among the nations in the Common European Home, the effective exchange of experience, national values, a tolerant dialogue and collaboration would be impossible without a good command of two or more foreign languages. The social necessity and imperative for early learning of a foreign language arise from this point of view. The significance of early foreign language education is emphasised in the documents of the European Council as they refer to reforms in the educational system. It is considered as guarantee of political, economic and cultural prosperity for the countries of the European Community (1 – 5).

Initiating the learning of a foreign language among preschool age children has always been a norm among some European countries notably France, England, Spain, Italy and Bulgaria. The language experiments in Bulgaria are presently at the local,

municipal and regional levels because foreign language studies are still not part of compulsory education at the preschool level. There are lots of difficulties and unsolved problems in the pursuit of foreign language studies in this country and prominent among them include the dearth of the following:

1. A programme of foreign language education at the preschool age level;
2. A foreign language book tailored to the needs of the children's mother tongue;
3. Worked out methods of early foreign language education;
4. Qualified foreign language teachers in the kindergarten;
5. Didactic materials for the successful accomplishment of early foreign language education.

Our present study is aimed at showing that very good results could be reached even with 5-7-year-old children but these results have to be based on the following: systematic, purposeful and hard work and suitable relationships among the partners of the instructive - educational process in the kindergarten; education in a system of purposes; school contents; means of obtaining them and reaching good results and availability of well-educated foreign language teachers for that age.

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METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH WORK

The aim of this research work is to create and attempt a theoretical – practical model of early foreign language education by means of game activities among the preschool age.

Tasks:

1. Researching the functional significance of the model in the process of its approbation on different age levels (5-6; 6 to 7 years old).
2. Researching the fundamental preconditions and indexes for the improvement of quality of preschool-age education in foreign language training of children by means of game activities.
3. Researching the influence of the model as a factor of socialisation and intercultural integration and for generating an interest in the 5-7-year-old children towards the culture of their peers.
4. Establishment and study of a system consisting of game activities for a step-by-step learning of the suggested school contents in French language involving the separate age groups and for the development and improvement of abilities and skills for creative practice of language knowledge in different situations.

Working hypothesis:

If the suggested lingua-didactic model of foreign language education for preschool age children is followed, a greater efficiency in the learning of language and communicative-speech skills will be attained compared to the usual general practice.

The scientific-applied activity has been accomplished in kindergartens in Bulgaria since 1998. The last one included 14 teachers and 183 children.

During the establishing of the lingua-didactic model we took into consideration the preschool educational program where it was emphasised that the foreign language was a vehicle, which served to develop the language and cognitive skills of children.

In this research work we used the global approach, which was typical for the instructive - educational process at preschool age children.

The suggested lingua-didactic model introducing French language to 5- to-7-year-old children had the following features: universality, dynamism and effectiveness. It was in accordance with the principles of

visualness, accessibility and orderliness. It introduced the French language by means of game activities in which priority was given in accordance with the child's creative skills or his/her ability to learn by manipulation of subjects. The model was designed in accordance with the requirements of tailor-made and individualised methodological principles like the following: communicativeness; situativeness; the principle of oral base, the principle of the role of native language and the principle of intercultural interactions.

Children's sensibility to a foreign language was accomplished on three levels of education, namely:

Level I: Introducing into a foreign language through a system of topics containing games with movements during the language classes;
Level II: Conveying of language knowledge to the other child's activities;
Level III: Individual practice of foreign language knowledge and skills in game activities.

The lingua-didactic model of foreign language education of preschool age children contained 12 topics and their corresponding motor games and game activities also.

Topics:

1. I find the world riches by means of the French language.
2. Who am I?
3. My family.
4. My friends - children, animals, plants and toys.
5. The seasons.
6. My birthplace.
7. My native country.
8. I go for sports.
9. My favourite occupation/profession/.
10. Holidays – in our country and in the other countries.
11. I like travelling.
12. I will become a student.

Organisation of education:

120 active lexical units and 30 passive lexical units were planned for learning every year. The lexical units signified specific terms. Each topic was given from 15 to 20 lexical units and for a lesson their number varied from 3 to 5. The acquiring of knowledge and the establishing of skills in the language and motor activities were achieved both spirally and concentrically. The time of the suggested topics and the number of classes depended on the working conditions and teacher's

preferences. It was good for the lessons to be 30 minutes if they were twice a week and 20 minutes if they were 5 times weekly.

Criteria and indexes for evaluation:

1. Knowledge in a foreign language
 - 1.1. Phonetics;
 - 1.2. Vocabulary;
 - 1.3. Grammar structures;
 - 1.4. Practicing the learned knowledge in other situations.
2. Cognitive activity
 - 2.1. Language activity in game
3. An attitude to the instructive - educational process
 - 3.1. Willingness to take part and carry out the tasks;
 - 3.2. Emotional satisfaction during the activity

and after its performance.

The criteria and the indexes were given for every child from the group and for the teacher as well.

An alternative analysis and the representative error m_p were used to summarise the results.

RESULTS

The accomplished experimental work showed positive results of the applied methods. The data of the quality and quantity analysis proved some improved children's skills for better and more precise learning of knowledge and skills in early foreign language training through game activities (**Table 1**).

Table 1: Survey of the positive contribution of teachers and 5-7- year-old children in foreign language teaching through game activities

Indexes	Teachers			Children		
	Average Number	P%	m_p	Average Number	P%	m_p
1.1. Phonetics	13	92	15	127	68	6
1.2. Vocabulary-number of words	13,6	97	9	140	77	6
1.3. Grammar Structures	14	100		137	75	6
1.4. Application	14	100		163	89	4
2.1. General speech activity	14	100		180	98	2
2.2. General motor activity	11	79	22	132	72	6
3.1. Adaptation – readiness	9	64	26	170	92	4
3.2. Emotional satisfaction	10	71	24	175	96	2
Total:	12,3	88	18	153	84	5

The plot, the aims, the performance, the contents and the roles of the game activities conveyed the children to a real or fantasy atmosphere. The competitive character and the movements of games facilitated children's recall of foreign words and expressions in a natural way as well as when they were used individually.

The data from the experiment showed some peculiarities as depicted on **Table 1**. The professional competence of the foreign language teacher had a beneficial influence both for the learning of phonetics, vocabulary

and grammar structures and for their practice on the part of the children as well. Teachers' adaptation and their emotional satisfaction were lower. This fact could be explained by the high criteria for self-evaluation and because of teachers' striving for perfection. But the same indexes: adaptation and emotional satisfaction were higher for children because of the typical features of the game activities.

Teacher's qualification, the contact with the parents and their agreement were guarantees for effectiveness in the early

foreign language learning. The game activities in the suggested model were beneficial for child's sensibility to the foreign language and for the development of psychomotor abilities.

furthered the harmonious child's development and establishing of his/her general culture.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The quality of language knowledge and skills for oral communication were improved.
2. The foreign language education accomplished by game activities generated preschool age children's motivation and interest.
3. Game situations accompanied by movements increased the speech and motor activity and also improved children's adaptable skills to transfer and practice knowledge and abilities in different conditions.
4. The lingua-didactic model in foreign language education through game activities

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