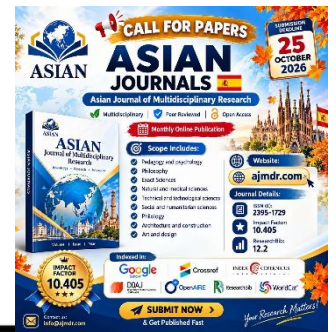




INTEGRATION OF DIDACTIC GAMES AND TOYS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SPEECH COMPETENCE IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract. This scientific article analyzes the role of play activities and the developmental characteristics of properly selected didactic materials in the speech development of preschool children, based on the conceptual views of M. Bardak and N. Topaç. It explores the possibilities of activating linguistic abilities, enriching vocabulary, and developing communicative skills through play, which is the most natural need of childhood. Furthermore, the specific methodological significance of oral-communicative, puppet theater, and fine motor-oriented finger games in improving children's speech is scientifically substantiated.

Keywords: early childhood education, play-based learning, didactic materials, speech culture, linguistic development, oral-auditory exercises, motor skills, communicative activity.

Introduction. In the early stages of human development, the processes of perceiving the outside world, adapting to the social environment, and establishing communication with others occur at a high dynamic pace. During this period, the most optimal factor that brings out a child's personality and activates their hidden potential is play. As noted by prominent educators M. Bardak and N. Topaç, "The most natural, fascinating, and effective means of expression in the child's world is undoubtedly play." It is through the play environment that a child analyzes reality, demonstrates internal feelings, and integrates into society.

One of the most important criteria for the development of preschool children is the

systematic formation of speech culture. Speech activity serves not only as a tool for exchanging thoughts, but also as the primary foundation for a child's intellectual (cognitive) and emotional growth. A play-based educational approach is not merely a meaningful organization of time, but a leading pedagogical lever that expands a child's attention, memory, logical reasoning, and, most importantly, speech capabilities.

In the practice of improving children's speech, relying solely on abstract and traditional teaching methods does not yield the expected positive results. In order to modernize the modern education system and enrich national educational content based on advanced foreign experiences, introducing free play activities that are appropriate for children's age characteristics and free from coercion is a priority today. Properly selected and purposefully directed play materials are of strategic importance in activating a child's scope of thinking and linguistic intuition.

Literature review. The function of the play phenomenon in child development, particularly in increasing vocabulary, has been the focus of attention for many scholars and researchers since ancient times. In the treasury of Eastern and Western pedagogical thought, several theoretical views can be found that explain the role of play in shaping thinking and speech:

Avicenna (980–1037): Evaluated play as a natural need of the child's organism and emphasized that it is the most necessary factor for physical perfection and finding one's place in the social environment.

Al-Ghazali (1058–1111): Stated that play activities sharpen children's minds, strengthen their memory, and bring out their capacity to actively assimilate information.

Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934): Paid special attention to the social and symbolic content of play, recognizing it as a primary tool that drives not only a child's intellectual, but also emotional development, including oral speech.

Jean Piaget (1896–1980): Considered play as a process by which a child processes

information obtained from the environment and harmonizes it into their personal cognitive and linguistic system.

Smilansky (1968): While studying the socio-dramatic features of children's games, demonstrated that speech activity develops rapidly during the process of a child reflecting reality through language and symbolic tools.

Modern scientific observations confirm that providing auditory and verbal content in the form of games has a positive effect on a child's reasoning system and mental tranquility. As the authors M. Bardak and N. Topaç explained in their research, a child demonstrates the way of understanding the laws of life and expressing their inner self precisely through a system of imitation and speech-based games.

Research methodology. Within the framework of this scientific research, play technologies and didactic toys used to form speech skills in preschool educational institutions were systematically analyzed. The methodological basis of the study consists of the teaching methods developed by M. Bardak and N. Topaç, which are widely used in the field.

Games used to improve speech and increase linguistic activity were divided into groups according to the following criteria based on their direction and perception characteristics:

1. **Oral-auditory (verbal) games:** Exercises where the child's phonemic hearing ability and correct perception of word meaning are a priority.
2. **Puppet and shadow theater games:** Interactive methods that activate the child's independent entry into dialogues and performance of various role intonations.
3. **Fine motor (finger) games:** Movements based on the mutual biological connection between fine motor skills and speech centers in the cerebral cortex.

During the research, the didactic functions of voice and linguistic play materials suitable for children of different age categories (early age and preschool age) were classified.

Results. The conducted theoretical and methodical analyses showed that active

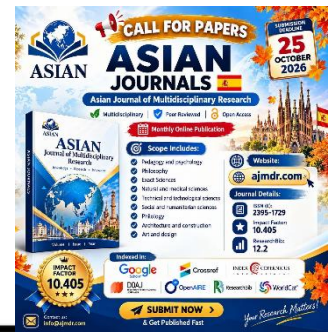
communication, singing, and participating in question-and-answer sessions during play contribute directly to increasing children's vocabulary. A child's freedom during play and the objects they use bring out the communicative function of speech.

The following table systemizes the main types of games used to activate children's speech and their linguistic effectiveness:

Direction of Play Activity	Didactic Materials Used	Main Indicators in Speech Growth
Oral-acoustic exercises	Sound-making devices, audiobooks and stories, visual cards	The ability to differentiate sounds (phonemic hearing) increases, and pronunciation accuracy is formed.
Theatric puppet games	Finger puppets, mini-theater decorations, marionettes	Communication culture and dialogic speech develop, and the ability to express thoughts consistently is formed.
Fine motor-oriented games	Geometric shapes, button and string details, constructors	Speech points develop through the activation of hand finger movements.
Socio-dramatic role-plays	Professional mock-ups, special costumes, and props	Active vocabulary expands, and the intonational and emotional aspects of speech become diverse.

Empirical observations show that compared to dry memorization methods, children demonstrate higher indicators in mastering new concepts in activities organized on the basis of oral-auditory products and play components.

Discussion. When discussing the connection between play mechanism and speech development factors, attention should be paid to the concept put forward by Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff (2008): "Children educated on the basis of programs where play is



dominant have a clear advantage in linguistic and logical skills." In a play environment, a child does not just repeat ready-made sentences, but creates new phrases to explain their purpose, which brings out creative thinking (creativity) in them.

As pedagogical scholars M. Bardak and N. Topaç emphasized, the importance of sound and oral products is immense in the learning model where the child's acoustic (hearing) ability is prioritized. Especially for children with speech delays or specific defectological deficiencies, specially adapted play activities serve as the most optimal psychological-therapeutic tool for catching up with their peers and adapting to society.

The unfortunate aspect is that today, in some educational centers, the share of play activities is artificially reduced as a result of focusing only on academic results. This situation does not match the natural needs of the child's organism. A child cannot communicate freely about a reality that they have not touched, felt, or observed. For this reason, it is necessary to expand the volume of free play zones and purposeful materials that activate oral speech in preschool environments.

Conclusion.In expanding the speech capabilities of preschool children, play is not merely an auxiliary tool, but the central content of the educational process. Based on the conducted research, the following final conclusions were formed:

1. Play activity is the most optimal and coercion-free way to expand a child's vocabulary, form correct differentiation of sounds, and shape interconnected speech.
2. The complex of didactic materials intended for verbal-acoustic and motor games stimulates speech zones in the child's cerebral cortex and maintains their need for communication at a high level.
3. Regular organization of quality, developing games with children in preschool education organizations and in family conditions allows them to fully demonstrate not only their speech culture, but also their general intellectual and creative potential.

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