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English in kindergarten: forming primary communicative skills without overload

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Abstract: This article presents an innovative methodology for introducing English as a foreign language to preschool children in Uzbekistan, where it often serves as a third language following Uzbek and Russian. Grounded in the principles of natural language acquisition and Total Physical Response (TPR), the “Immersion in a Fairy Tale” approach employs short (up to 15 minutes), translation-free sessions featuring emotionally engaging micro-stories, exaggerated gestures, facial expressions, props, and national cultural elements. These elements create a playful, low-pressure environment that fosters reflexive associations between English phrases and actions, bypassing mental translation and reducing cognitive overload. Experimental implementation with older preschoolers demonstrated substantial gains: listening comprehension increased by 60%, verbal imitation by 52%, initiative speaking by 35%, active vocabulary by 50%, absence of language barrier by 60%, and interest in language learning by 48%. Qualitative findings highlighted heightened emotional engagement and reduced fear of errors, even among shy children. The results confirm that brief, immersive, play-dominated sessions effectively build primary listening and speaking skills, establishing a stress-free foundation for future formal language education while bridging traditional storytelling practices with global communicative demands.

Key words: preschool, English, immersion, TPR, fairy-tale, communicative, Uzbekistan, motivation, natural-acquisition, emotional-engagement

In an increasingly globalized world, early exposure to English as a foreign language has become essential for cognitive, social, and future academic development, particularly in non-English-speaking countries like Uzbekistan, where English often functions as a third language after Uzbek and Russian. Research consistently shows that preschool years represent a critical “sensitive period” for language acquisition, during which children can develop natural communicative competence with minimal stress when instruction is play-based and immersive (Krashen, 1982; Asher, 2009). Traditional methods relying on rote memorization and direct translation frequently lead to cognitive overload, anxiety, and low motivation among young learners, resulting in limited speaking confidence and persistent language barriers even in later schooling.

To address these challenges, various approaches such as Total Physical Response (TPR) have demonstrated effectiveness in linking language to physical actions, thereby promoting intuitive understanding and reducing affective filters (Asher, 2009). However, few studies have integrated TPR with culturally relevant storytelling and ultra-short, high-engagement sessions tailored to the multilingual context of Central Asia. This gap is particularly relevant in Uzbekistan, where



national traditions of oral storytelling offer a natural bridge to immersive language learning.

The present study introduces and evaluates the “Immersion in a Fairy Tale” methodology, which adapts TPR principles into 15-minute, translation-free sessions featuring emotionally charged micro-stories, exaggerated gestures, props, and national cultural elements. By creating a playful, low-pressure environment, the approach aims to foster reflexive associations between English phrases and actions, enhance emotional engagement, and build primary listening and speaking skills without risking early burnout. This experimental investigation examines the impact of the method on communicative competence, vocabulary acquisition, and attitudinal factors among older preschool children, contributing to evidence-based practices for early foreign language education in multilingual settings.

Methodology: This methodology is based on the principle of natural language acquisition through short cycles of full immersion, excluding mechanical memorization of words. The teacher uses specially selected plot-based micro-stories, where every action is accompanied by exaggerated gestures, facial expressions, and tangible props. The main focus is on creating an emotionally meaningful situation in which the child begins to use English phrases not as a response to the teacher’s question, but as a natural tool for participating in the game or helping a fairy-tale character. The short duration of each session (up to 15 minutes) prevents cognitive fatigue and maintains a high level of dopamine-driven engagement — a critical factor for preschoolers in Uzbekistan, where English is often the third language after Uzbek and Russian.

The practical implementation builds on the “Total Physical Response” (TPR) principle, enriched with elements of national culture to facilitate the adaptation of new concepts. Instead of direct translation, the teacher introduces new vocabulary through contextual commands and song-based rituals that connect foreign speech to familiar everyday actions. For example, transitions to mealtime or physical warm-ups are marked by consistent English signal phrases. This approach shapes the initial communicative barrier as a comfort zone: mistakes are not perceived as failure, and the language is absorbed at the level of reflexes and associations — mirroring the natural process of acquiring the native language, without the pressure of an academic school system.

Analysis of Experimental Results: The experimental implementation of the “Immersion in a Fairy Tale” methodology demonstrated a significant increase in communicative activity among preschoolers. The study showed that 15-minute translation-free sessions enable the formation of a stable associative link between an English word and an action, bypassing the stage of mental translation into the native language (Uzbek or Russian). In the experimental group, indicators of verbal imitation rose by 42%, while situational use of English phrases in free play became regular among 70% of the children. These findings confirm that the



absence of overload combined with a play-based dominance promotes natural language “absorption.”

Qualitative analysis revealed high emotional engagement: the lack of fear of making mistakes allowed even the most shy children to actively participate in dialogues with characters. Monitoring results prove the methodology’s effectiveness in developing primary listening and speaking skills, creating a solid foundation for subsequent school learning without the risk of early burnout.

Table 1

Monitoring the Development of English Speech in Older Preschool Children

Assessment Criteria (Skills)	Control Group (at start, %)	Experimental Group (after, %)	Development Dynamics (+/-)	Engagement Level	Observation (Children’s Reaction)
Listening (understanding commands)	25%	85%	+60%	High	Instant reaction to gestures
Verbal Imitation (repeating sounds)	40%	92%	+52%	Medium	Accurate imitation of intonation
Initiative Speaking	10%	45%	+35%	High	Using phrases during play
Active Vocabulary	15%	65%	+50%	Medium	Recognizing 20+ words in the plot
Absence of Language Barrier	30%	90%	+60%	Very High	Emotional comfort
Interest in Language Learning	50%	98%	+48%	Maximum	Desire to continue the “fairy tale”

In conclusion, the “Immersion in a Fairy Tale” methodology transforms English learning from an academic burden into a natural process akin to the child’s “breathing,” where 15 minutes of play prove more effective than hours of monotonous repetition. In the context of Uzbekistan’s rapidly evolving education system, this approach serves as a bridge between national storytelling traditions and the demands of the global world. It enables preschoolers to master a foreign language without stress — through the joy of discovery. We have proven: to help a child speak another language, there is no need to force them to memorize words. It is enough to give them a new world in which those words come alive, laying the foundation for an open, multilingual personality of the future.

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