INNOVATIVE METHODS OF TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract:
Teaching English to young learners requires methods that reflect their age, interests, and learning needs. Modern language teaching therefore emphasises interactive, learner-centred approaches such as games, storytelling, TPR, songs, communicative activities, projects, and digital technologies. Based on a qualitative literature review, this article examines how these methods support learners' motivation, vocabulary development, and communication skills. The findings highlight the importance of appropriate materials and effective teacher preparation.
Keywords: young learners, English language teaching, innovative methods, game-based learning, storytelling, TPR.

Annotatsiya:
Yosh o‘quvchilarga ingliz tilini o‘rgatish ularning yoshi, qiziqishlari va o‘rganish ehtiyojlariga mos metodlarni talab qiladi. Shu sababli zamonaviy til ta’limida o‘yinlar, hikoya qilish, TPR, qo‘shiqlar, kommunikativ mashg‘ulotlar, loyihalar va raqamli texnologiyalar kabi interfaol, o‘quvchiga yo‘naltirilgan yondashuvlarga ustuvor ahamiyat beriladi. Ushbu maqolada sifatli adabiyotlar tahlili asosida mazkur metodlarning o‘quvchilar motivatsiyasi, lug‘at boyligi va kommunikativ ko‘nikmalarini rivojlantirishdagi ahamiyati o‘rganiladi. Natijalar mos o‘quv materiallari va o‘qituvchining puxta tayyorgarligi muhimligini ko‘rsatadi.
Kalit so’zlar: Yosh o‘quvchilar, ingliz tilini o‘qitish, innovatsion metodlar, o‘yin asosida o‘qitish, hikoya qilish, jismoniy harakatlar orqali o‘rgatish (TPR).

Аннотация:
Обучение английскому языку детей младшего возраста требует применения методов, соответствующих их возрасту, интересам и образовательным потребностям. Поэтому современное языковое образование уделяет особое внимание интерактивным подходам, ориентированным на учащихся, таким как игры, рассказывание историй, метод TPR, песни, коммуникативные задания, проекты и цифровые технологии. В данной статье на основе качественного анализа научной литературы рассматривается влияние этих методов на мотивацию учащихся, развитие словарного запаса и коммуникативных навыков. Результаты подчёркивают важность подходящих учебных материалов и надлежащей подготовки учителя.
Ключевые слова: Дети младшего школьного возраста, преподавание английского языка, инновационные методы, обучение на основе игр, рассказывание историй, метод полного физического реагирования (TPR).

Introduction

English has become an essential means of international communication, education, and professional development. As a result, many educational systems introduce English at an increasingly early age.

However, teaching a foreign language to children requires a different approach from teaching adults because young learners have specific cognitive, emotional, and social characteristics. They generally learn more effectively through meaningful experiences, interaction, repetition, play, and visual materials rather than through lengthy explanations of grammatical rules. Cameron emphasises the importance of understanding children's language development and creating classroom activities that provide meaningful opportunities for language use[1].

Young learners are naturally curious and often demonstrate greater interest when lessons involve movement, imagination, creativity, and communication. Therefore, teachers need to create a supportive environment in which children can participate actively and develop confidence in using English. Pinter highlights the importance of connecting theoretical knowledge about child development with practical classroom activities and age-appropriate teaching materials[2]. Similarly, Shin and Crandall explain that effective English lessons for children should include clear learning objectives, active participation, and activities that reflect learners' interests and abilities[3].

Innovative teaching methods can make English lessons more interactive and meaningful. These methods do not simply introduce entertaining activities; they also provide opportunities for learners to practise vocabulary, pronunciation, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The Primary English Teacher's Guide also emphasises the value of combining different classroom techniques to support children's language development[4].

The purpose of this article is to examine innovative methods of teaching English to young learners and explain how they can contribute to language development. The article also considers the challenges teachers may face when implementing these approaches and suggests practical ways to address them.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative literature review approach to examine innovative methods used in teaching English to young learners. Academic books, research articles, and systematic reviews related to language acquisition, primary English education, and modern teaching approaches were reviewed.

The selected literature was analysed thematically to identify frequently discussed teaching methods and their potential educational benefits. Particular attention was given to game-based learning, storytelling, Total Physical Response, songs and rhymes, communicative activities, project-based learning, and technology-supported instruction.

The theoretical analysis also considered general principles of second language acquisition and language teaching. Lightbown and Spada explain that language learning is influenced by meaningful exposure, interaction, opportunities for practice, and the conditions in which learners use the target language[5]. These principles provide a theoretical basis for evaluating the selected teaching methods.

As this article is based on previously published literature, it does not report original classroom experiments or survey results. Instead, it synthesises existing findings and discusses their practical implications for English language teachers working with young learners.

Results

The literature review identifies several innovative methods that can support children's engagement and English language development. Each method offers different opportunities for practising language skills, and their effectiveness may increase when they are combined according to lesson objectives.

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Game-Based Learning

Game-based learning is one of the most widely used approaches in teaching English to children. Games create opportunities for learners to practise vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and communication in an enjoyable environment. Activities such as word matching, vocabulary races, memory games, guessing games, and classroom competitions encourage children to participate actively. Games also provide a natural reason for learners to communicate with their classmates. For example, in a guessing game, students may ask questions, describe objects, and use newly learned vocabulary to identify an answer. A systematic review by Ishaq and colleagues examines the use of mobile-assisted and gamification-based approaches in language learning and highlights the growing role of interactive technologies in language education[6]. Recent research has also examined gamification specifically in English language teaching for young learners. Amalia and Amelia report that gamified activities can support motivation, classroom engagement, and grammar learning, although further research is needed across a wider range of language skills[7]. Therefore, teachers should select games that have clear learning purposes rather than using them only for entertainment.

Storytelling

Storytelling is another effective method because children are naturally interested in stories, characters, and imaginative situations. Through stories, learners encounter new vocabulary and grammatical structures in meaningful contexts. Teachers can use illustrated books, puppets, flashcards, pictures, and short videos to make stories easier to understand. For example, after listening to a story about animals, students can identify characters, describe their appearance, answer comprehension questions, and retell the main events. These activities develop listening and speaking skills while reinforcing vocabulary. Digital storytelling extends this method by combining narration, pictures, animation, music, and other multimedia elements. Yu and Zeng's systematic review identifies the potential of digital storytelling to support language acquisition, motivation, learner autonomy, collaboration, and digital literacy[8]. Nevertheless, teachers should ensure that stories are appropriate for learners' language levels and that digital elements support rather than distract from the learning objectives.

Total Physical Response (TPR)

Total Physical Response is a teaching method that connects language learning with physical movement. In this approach, teachers give instructions in English and learners demonstrate their understanding by performing actions. For example, students may respond to commands such as "Stand up", "Open your book", "Touch your nose", or "Walk to the door". The method is particularly suitable for introducing action verbs, classroom instructions, body parts, and everyday expressions. It allows children to understand language through listening and movement before they are expected to produce longer spoken responses. Asher introduced the Total Physical Response approach as a method that connects language comprehension with physical actions[9]. Research by Cang and colleagues also investigated the effects of TPR on young learners' vocabulary ability and their perceptions of this teaching method[10].

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[6] Ishaq, K., Zin, N. A. M., Rosdi, F., Jehanghir, M., Ishaq, S., & Abid, A. (2021). Mobile-assisted and gamification-based language learning: A systematic literature review. *PeerJ Computer Science, 7*, e496. https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj-cs.496

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These studies demonstrate why movement-based activities deserve consideration in primary English classrooms.

Songs, rhymes, and chants

Songs, rhymes, and chants can make language lessons more enjoyable while providing repeated exposure to vocabulary, pronunciation patterns, and sentence structures. Their rhythm and repetition help children become familiar with the sounds and expressions of English. Teachers can use songs to introduce topics such as numbers, colours, animals, family members, and daily routines. Action songs are especially useful because learners can sing, listen, and perform movements simultaneously. Çevikbaş, Yumurtacı, and Mede examined the use of songs with first-grade EFL learners and reported positive contributions to vocabulary development[11]. In addition, Concannon-Gibney discusses how nursery rhymes can be used to introduce vocabulary and grammar to children learning English as an additional language[12]. These findings suggest that musical activities can support language learning when teachers select suitable materials and connect them with specific lesson objectives.

Communicative and Role-Playing Activities

Communicative language teaching focuses on developing learners' ability to use English for meaningful communication. Instead of concentrating exclusively on memorising rules, students are encouraged to exchange information, express ideas, ask questions, and respond to others. Role-playing is a practical way to introduce communication into young learners' classrooms. Students can act out familiar situations, such as shopping, visiting a doctor, ordering food, or meeting new people. For instance, one student may act as a shop assistant while another plays a customer. Through this activity, learners practise everyday expressions in a realistic context. Richards and Rodgers explain that communicative approaches emphasise meaningful language use, interaction, and the development of communicative competence[13]. Carless also discusses the implementation of task-based learning with young learners and considers classroom participation, the use of the first language, and the organisation of classroom activities[14]. These approaches demonstrate the importance of giving children opportunities to use English for practical purposes.

Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning encourages students to use English while completing meaningful tasks over a period of time. Rather than focusing only on individual exercises, learners work towards creating a final product, such as a poster, presentation, model, booklet, or classroom exhibition. For example, students can prepare a project about their favourite animals, describe their hometown, create a family tree, or present information about healthy lifestyles. During the process, they search for information, discuss ideas, organise content, and present their work in English. This method can develop language skills alongside creativity, cooperation, problem-solving, and independent learning. Teachers should provide clear instructions, divide larger tasks into manageable stages, and offer language support so that all learners can participate successfully.

Digital Technologies in English Language Teaching

Digital technologies have created additional opportunities for teaching English to young learners. Interactive applications, educational videos, digital flashcards, online quizzes, and multimedia presentations can make lessons more engaging and provide different forms of language practice. For example, teachers can use digital quizzes to review vocabulary, short videos to develop listening comprehension, and interactive activities to practise grammar. Mobile-assisted language learning can

[11] Çevikbaş, G., Yumurtacı, N., & Mede, E. (2018). Effects of songs on the development of vocabulary among first grade EFL learners. *Language Teaching and Educational Research, 1*(2), 101–120. https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/later/article/451712

[12] Concannon-Gibney, T. (2021). "Teacher, Teacher, can't Catch Me!": Teaching vocabulary and grammar using nursery rhymes to children for whom English is an additional language. *The Reading Teacher, 75*(1), 41–50. https://doi.org/10.1002/trtr.2013

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[14] Carless, D. (2002). Implementing task-based learning with young learners. *ELT Journal, 56*(4), 389–396. https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/56.4.389

also provide learners with opportunities to review language outside the classroom. Ishaq and colleagues' review discusses the relationship between mobile-assisted learning and gamification, showing how digital tools have become an important area of language-learning research[15]. More recent research by Ülker and Yangın Ekşi reviews studies on gamification in English language teaching and identifies motivation, engagement, and language development as important areas of investigation[16]. However, technology should not replace teacher guidance or direct communication. Teachers need to select reliable, age-appropriate resources and ensure that digital activities are connected to the lesson's learning outcomes.

Discussion

The reviewed literature indicates that innovative teaching methods can contribute to a more active and engaging English learning environment. However, no single method is equally effective for every learner or classroom situation. Children's language levels, interests, learning preferences, and classroom conditions should influence teachers' methodological choices. One important finding is that combining different methods can provide more balanced language practice. For example, a teacher may introduce new vocabulary through a story, reinforce it with a song, practise it through a game, and encourage learners to use it in a role-play activity. Such integration gives children repeated opportunities to recognise, understand, and produce new language.

Another important consideration is the role of the teacher. Innovative methods require careful planning, clear instructions, appropriate materials, and effective classroom management. Teachers should ensure that activities are connected to specific learning objectives and that every student has an opportunity to participate. As Richards and Rodgers explain, teaching approaches involve not only classroom activities but also the roles of teachers and learners, learning materials, and the organisation of instruction[17].

There are also practical challenges associated with implementing innovative methods. Some schools may have limited access to digital devices or reliable internet connections. In addition, teachers may experience difficulties managing group activities, maintaining students' attention, or selecting suitable online resources. These challenges can be addressed through careful lesson planning, low-cost teaching materials, pair and group work, and a balanced combination of digital and traditional resources. Furthermore, teachers should assess whether an activity produces meaningful learning rather than measuring success only through students' enjoyment. Short vocabulary checks, oral responses, classroom observation, presentations, and formative assessments can help teachers monitor progress. The main objective should be to create an environment in which children feel confident, motivated, and willing to use English.

Conclusion

In conclusion, innovative methods play an important role in teaching English to young learners because they make language learning more interactive, meaningful, and engaging. Game-based learning, storytelling, Total Physical Response, songs and rhymes, communicative activities, project-based learning, and digital technologies offer different opportunities to develop children's language skills.

The literature reviewed in this article suggests that these approaches can support vocabulary development, listening comprehension, speaking confidence, motivation, and classroom participation.

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[15] Ishaq, K., Zin, N. A. M., Rosdi, F., Jehanghir, M., Ishaq, S., & Abid, A. (2021). Mobile-assisted and gamification-based language learning: A systematic literature review. *PeerJ Computer Science, 7*, e496. https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj-cs.496

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[17] Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009024532

Nevertheless, their success depends on appropriate implementation, effective teacher guidance, and the selection of activities that correspond to learners' developmental needs.

Therefore, English teachers should avoid relying on a single teaching method and instead combine different approaches according to lesson objectives and students' abilities. By creating supportive, interactive, and learner-centred classrooms, teachers can encourage young learners to develop positive attitudes towards English and build a strong foundation for further language learning.

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