

PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES AND MODELS IN EARLY MOTHER-TONGUE LEARNING AMONG PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract: The emergence of speech in humans is a complex process shaped by biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional development. Consequently, the methodology of early native language learning integrates insights from pedagogy, didactics, developmental psychology, linguistics, children’s literature studies, and contemporary teaching and learning approaches tailored to the developmental stages of preschool children.

Preschool-aged children should be exposed to stimulating language interactions. Therefore, the conditions and pedagogical approaches established by educators in kindergartens play a critical role. Language development in children is fostered through play, child–child and child–adult interactions, exploratory and discovery-based activities, and problem-solving situations.

This study analyzes the perceptions and practices of kindergarten educators in the Aerodrom municipality of Skopje to assess the effectiveness of methodological approaches and teaching models in promoting proper speech development. The theoretical framework draws on Vygotsky’s sociocultural perspective, Piaget’s cognitive theories, and Roman Jakobson’s linguistic research on the relationships between language stimulation, phonological awareness, and early literacy. Data analysis revealed that educators frequently observe foreign words, dialectal forms, and jargon in children’s speech. Educators also emphasize that the number of children who start speaking at an older age is growing. These occurrences are linked to media exposure, digital devices, and everyday linguistic interactions. Such linguistic interferences underscore the need to systematically enrich children’s native language vocabulary, foster language awareness, and engage in stimulating communicative activities. The research also confirms that language development occurs within dynamic social interaction.

Effective strategies include interactive reading, dramatic play, the use of picture books, contextualized speech, and joint-attention activities. These practices support the natural advancement of children’s communication skills, cognitive development, and narrative competence. The findings highlight the importance of continuous methodological support for educators, the enhancement of linguistically rich and interactive learning environments, and the design of activities that actively promote mother-tongue acquisition. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of early language learning methodology and provides a foundation for future research aimed at strengthening linguistic competencies in young children.

Keywords: early native language learning; language development; first speech; preschool education

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The development of speech in children aged 1 to 6 represents a complex interaction between biological preparedness, sociocultural context, and pedagogical practices. From Piaget’s perspective, language development correlates with cognitive maturation, whereby children, through the sensorimotor and preoperational stages, construct symbolic representations that gradually enable vocabulary expansion. Vygotsky, in contrast, emphasizes the significance of social interaction and the *zone of proximal development*, arguing that high-quality linguistic input from adults activates the child’s intrinsic motivation for communication. Contemporary findings support these theoretical foundations: studies by Astuti and Yafie (2025) and Lerkkanen (2025) demonstrate that dialogic play, structured reading, and linguistically enriched activities stimulate the production of new words and strengthen phonological awareness already in the preschool years.

Aligned with Chomsky’s biological perspective, which posits an innate language faculty, recent research indicates that although children possess a natural readiness to “decode” linguistic structures, the quality of linguistic stimulation remains crucial for the pace of acquisition. Joner (2025) shows that early language competencies strongly predict later reading abilities, underscoring the importance of a rich linguistic environment from as early as 1–3 years of age. At the same time, developmental psychology studies, such as that by Fekonja and colleagues (2024), confirm that parental linguistic input and the limited use of electronic media significantly accelerate early language development, particularly in comprehension and active vocabulary.

The linguistic perspective in recent literature—exemplified by Engel de Abreu (2025)—further indicates that, for both monolingual and bilingual children, mother-tongue-based language interventions yield substantial benefits for vocabulary expansion, syntactic complexity, and communicative competence. Taken together, these contemporary

and classical theoretical approaches affirm that speech development is the result of a dynamic interplay between biological predispositions, environmental conditions, and pedagogical support, with the greatest effectiveness achieved when the child is immersed in rich, interactive, and socioculturally meaningful linguistic practices.

Methodology in early language learning expands this view by emphasizing that the *quality* of linguistic stimulation is more important than its quantity. High-quality speech stimulation entails language that is clear, modulated, varied in intonation, and structured into short and meaningfully connected segments, rather than mechanical repetition or the mere accumulation of words. Research shows that children who grow up in environments characterized by functional verbal interaction—such as when adults follow the child’s focus of attention, label what the child sees, and offer speech adjusted to the child’s level—demonstrate faster vocabulary growth and more advanced grammatical structures.

Within the Early Learning and Development Programme of the Republic of North Macedonia, in the area Language, Communication, and Literacy Development, the general goals for the developmental period up to six years of age are defined as follows:

- to develop the ability to listen to and understand spoken language;
- to develop the ability to speak correctly and with eloquence;
- to develop language abilities as the basis for the child’s personal, national, and cultural identity;
- to develop the ability to listen to, understand, and experience language;
- to develop communication skills;
- to develop the ability to express one’s thoughts meaningfully and grammatically correctly;
- to foster love and a positive attitude toward books;
- to encourage and develop interest in reading books;
- to encourage and develop interest in written expression;
- to introduce and familiarize children with the foundations of written language;
- to encourage creativity;
- to develop an awareness of cultural and linguistic diversity.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Building upon the general goals outlined in the section *Language, Communication, and Literacy Development*, the study proceeds toward the specific objectives relevant to its focus. The subject of this research is the assessment of the extent to which selected goals within the designated sub-areas of the programme—namely *Communication and Media Culture* and *Reading and Vocabulary Enrichment*—are achieved for the developmental periods of 2–3 years and 3–4 years. The primary aim of the research endeavour is to compare the defined individual goals and expected outcomes of the noted thematic areas with the empirical findings, with particular attention to the strategies, methods, techniques, and tools employed by early childhood educators to stimulate correct speech production and the development of an authentic (Macedonian) vocabulary. The study further examines the challenges and barriers encountered by educators and children in the process of learning and developing the mother tongue within preschool settings.

Main hypothesis: The methodology of early learning of the mother (Macedonian) language correlates with the goals and expected outcomes prescribed in the programme for Early Learning and Development within the segments *Communication and Media Culture* and *Reading and Vocabulary Enrichment* for children aged 2–3 and 3–4 years. The research sample includes early childhood educators from all preschools located in the Municipality of Aerodrom, Skopje, working in groups with children in the developmental stages of 2–3 and 3–4 years.

Methods, Techniques, and Research Instruments The research is descriptive and comparative in nature, with elements of prognostic analysis. The procedures applied in the research include historical, statistical, and analytical approaches. The following methods were employed: descriptive method, content analysis of documents, analysis of the correspondence between programme content and its practical implementation

Research procedures, instruments, and techniques included: A questionnaire distributed to early childhood educators implementing the Early Learning and Development Programme in groups with children aged 2–3 and 3–4 years (total number of respondents: 65). Content analysis of legal and sub-legal acts regulating this area. Analysis of professional documents (Early Learning and Development Programme, tools for evaluating children’s achievements—child portfolios, standards, norms, etc.). Analysis of questionnaires, tabulated datasets, and protocols for the purpose of organising and processing empirical data. Interpretation of research findings. Application of the research results.

In accordance with the research subject, aim, tasks, and hypotheses, it was necessary to identify all documents containing relevant information and evidence pertaining to the phenomenon under investigation.

3. INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

This section presents the findings obtained from the conducted research, based on a questionnaire consisting of two parts. The first part included questions aimed at collecting general information about the respondents, of which several variables were relevant to our analysis. The majority of respondents (44.6%) have between 10 and 20 years of work experience. A total of 21.5% reported having between 5 and 10 years of experience, as well as more than 20 years of experience, while the smallest group, 12.3%, have fewer than 5 years of professional experience. These data indicate that the sample is largely composed of educators with substantial professional experience.

The second part of the questionnaire consisted of questions directly related to the topic of the research.

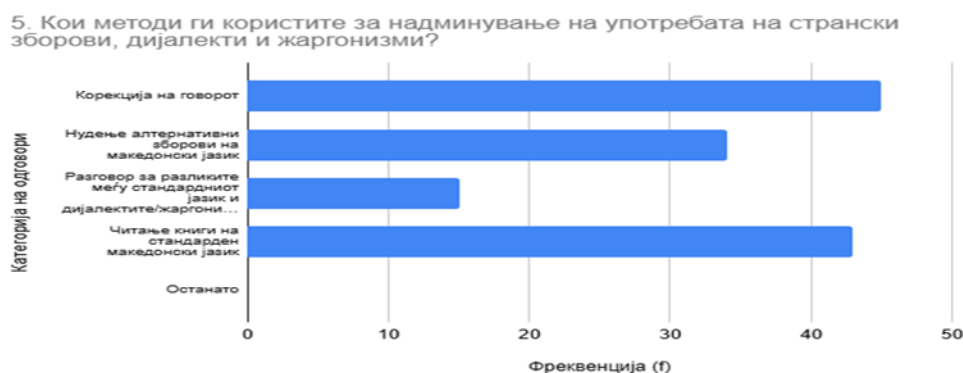
Table 1: Distribution of results for the use of different methods in early mother tongue learning



Source: author research

In response to the question “Which methods do you most frequently use to stimulate the acquisition and application of correct speech among children?”, the results indicate that the most commonly used method is storytelling, selected by 49 respondents (23%). The use of song singing, word-play activities, and picture-book reading is evenly represented, with a total of 43 responses each. Conversations about everyday activities are practiced in the groups of 39 respondents (18%). Overall, educators employ nearly all methods in a balanced manner, with a slight preference for storytelling.

Table2: Distribution of results for the use of different methods to address challenges in early mother tongue learning



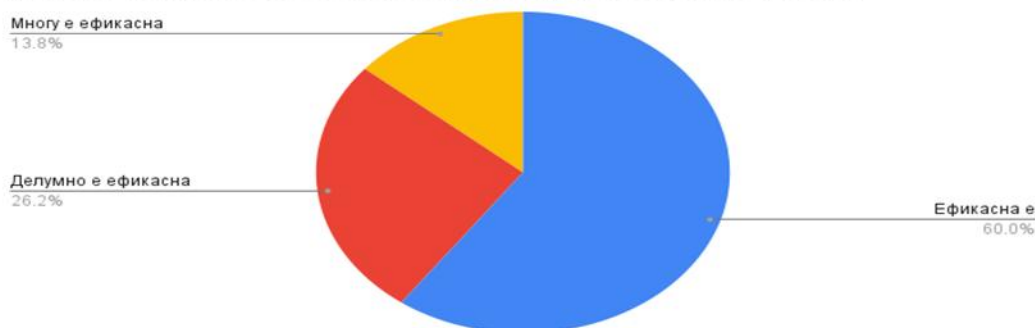
Source: author research

The most frequently used method for overcoming the use of foreign words, dialect forms, and slang among children is speech correction, selected by 45 respondents (33%). This is followed by reading books in standard Macedonian, chosen by 43 respondents (31%). The method of offering alternative Macedonian words is used less frequently (25%), while discussions about the differences between the standard language and dialects/slang are the least

practiced (11%). These findings indicate that educators tend to focus more on direct speech correction than on providing linguistic education about language variation or fostering children's awareness of different language forms.

Table3: Distribution of results on the effectiveness of the early mother tongue learning methodology

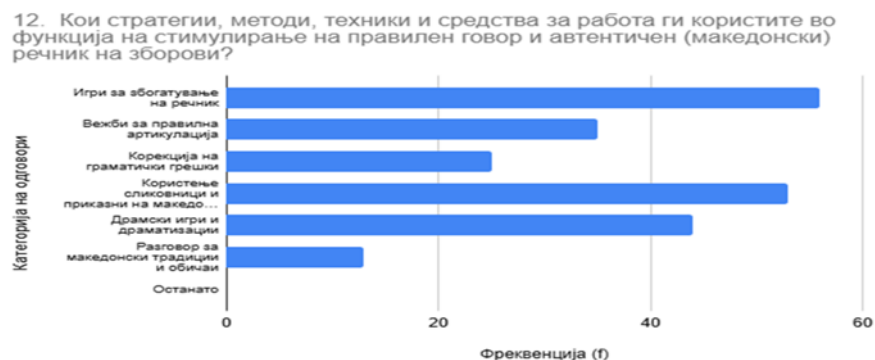
6. Колку е ефикасна според вас методиката на рано учење на мајчиниот јазик во надминувањето на јазичните предизвици кај децата?



Source: author research

The results indicate that 60% of respondents perceive the methodology of early learning in the Macedonian language as effective in overcoming children's language-related challenges. Furthermore, 26.2% consider it partially effective, while 13.4% regard it as highly effective. None of the respondents stated that it is not effective at all. These findings demonstrate a predominantly positive attitude toward its applicability in addressing linguistic challenges.

Table 4: Distribution of results on the use of different strategies, techniques, and tools for early mother tongue learning



Source: author research

The data indicate that the most frequently used method for stimulating correct speech and the development of an authentic vocabulary is vocabulary-enrichment games, employed by 25% of respondents. The second most commonly used strategy is the use of picture books and storytelling in Macedonian (23%). Following these are dramatic play and dramatizations (19%), articulation exercises (15%), and correction of grammatical errors (11%), while discussions about Macedonian traditions and customs are the least utilized technique (6%). These findings suggest that educators prioritize engaging and practical approaches to language learning. The table below organizes the responses to an open-ended question, which asked participants to list the most effective methods in the methodology for teaching the mother tongue to children aged 2–3 and 3–4 years.

Table 5: Categorization of responses to the question regarding the most effective methods in the methodology for teaching the mother tongue to children aged 2–3 and 3–4 years

Категорија	Број на одговори
Разговор и комуникација	33
Читање и литература	30
Говорни игри и говорни вежби	24
Раскажување и прераскажување	23
Драматизација	10
Песнички и стихотворби	7
Демонстрација	6
Аудиовизуелни средства	4

Source: author research

The following question, also open-ended, was: “*In your opinion, what are the greatest obstacles children face in acquiring their mother tongue?*” The procedure for data analysis was the same as for the previous question, and the results are presented in tabular form.

Table 6: Categorization of responses to the question regarding the greatest obstacles children face in acquiring their mother tongue

Категорија	Број на одговори
Прекумерна употреба на дигитални уреди	35
Недоволна комуникација и внимание од страна на семејството	27
Влијание на странските јазици и дијалекти	11
Проблеми со концентрација / Здравствени проблеми (Невнимание, отсуство на говор, задоцнет говор, говорни потешкотии)	9

Source: author research

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The most frequently used methods for promoting the acquisition and application of correct speech among children are storytelling, singing songs, word-play activities, and reading picture books, with conversations about everyday situations also being employed. The data indicate that educators utilize a variety of strategies to stimulate children’s speech, giving a slight preference to storytelling.

Regarding the mitigation of the use of words deviating from standard Macedonian, the most commonly applied methods are speech correction and reading books in literary Macedonian. Responses to this question show that educators more often rely on direct speech correction rather than on explaining the differences between standard language and dialects or offering alternative words. While this approach is appropriate in the immediate context, it is also essential to develop children’s linguistic awareness, enabling them to gain a deeper understanding of language forms.

Responses to the question concerning the methods and strategies used to stimulate correct and authentic speech indicate that educators favor engaging and practical approaches to language learning, such as vocabulary-enrichment games, dramatic play, and the use of picture books, while comparatively less emphasis is placed on articulation exercises, correction of grammatical errors, and discussions about Macedonian traditions. Considering that the study involves preschool-aged children, playful and enjoyable approaches are developmentally appropriate. However, exercises for correct articulation remain crucial and should be an integral part of children’s speech development.

The results of this study are also particularly relevant for higher education institutions responsible for training personnel who will work in preschools and in elementary school classrooms.

The primary challenges faced by educators in relation to speech development and the cultivation of standard Macedonian include the influence of digital devices, insufficient family-based communication and speech stimulation, and the interference of foreign languages and dialects in children’s daily experiences.

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