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DEVELOPMENT OF SPEAKING AND LISTENING SKILLS IN PRIMARY SCHOOL LEARNERS: A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

РОЗВИТОК НАВИЧОК ГОВОРІННЯ ТА АУДІЮВАННЯ В ЗДОБУВАЧІВ ПОЧАТКОВОЇ ОСВІТИ: ПСИХОЛОГО-ПЕДАГОГІЧНИЙ АСПЕКТ

Bilier O.S. / Білер О.С.*c.p.s., as. prof. / к.п.н., доц.*

ORCID: 0000-0001-9969-3289

Vasko O.O. / Васько О.О.*c.p.s., as. prof. / к.п.н., доц.*

ORCID: 0000-0001-5241-0958

*Sumy State Pedagogical University named after A. S. Makarenko,
Sumy, Romenska, 87, 4002**Сумський державний педагогічний університет імені А.С. Макаренка,
Суми, Роменська, 87, 40002*

Abstract. *The article addresses the development of speaking and listening skills in primary school learners in the context of globalisation and the digital transformation of education. English is viewed as an essential tool of intercultural communication, which necessitates the early and high-quality formation of foreign-language communicative competence. Special attention is paid to speaking and listening as basic types of speech activity that ensure direct oral interaction.*

The paper outlines the role of the initial stage of learning English in establishing the psycholinguistic foundations of communicative competence and characterises the organisation of primary education in Ukraine. It emphasises that traditional, predominantly reproductive forms of instruction are insufficiently aligned with younger learners' age-related psychological characteristics, whereas interactive and activity-based formats reveal significant potential for integrating speaking and listening.

The study is based on an analysis of the State Standard of Primary General Education and current foreign language curricula, a synthesis of psychological and pedagogical literature on the development of younger schoolchildren, and methodological research on teaching foreign languages. Theoretical methods include analysis, comparison and generalisation of scholarly sources, systematisation of psychological and pedagogical factors in speech development and conceptualisation of communicative, situational and interactive approaches.

The findings demonstrate that the development of speaking and listening skills is conditioned by a complex interaction of psychological factors (concrete and image-based thinking, predominance of involuntary attention, emotional sensitivity, high imitative capacity) and pedagogical factors (teaching methods, level of interactivity, teacher professionalism, classroom climate). The communicative approach, implemented through instructional speech situations, together with interactive techniques (pair and group work, role-plays, dramatisations, creative tasks) creates favourable conditions for systematic practice of oral communication and enhances pupils' motivation and engagement.

It is argued that learner-centred, situational and interactive organisation of lessons makes it possible to fully exploit the developmental potential of primary school age, while digital and gamified tools further diversify activities and support pupils' cognitive activity in foreign-language communication. At the same time, there remains a need for empirical studies comparing different combinations of interactive and gamified methods



Key words: *speaking skills; listening skills; primary school learners; psychological and pedagogical factors; communicative approach; interactive learning; gamified learning; English as a foreign language.*

Introduction.

The contemporary primary school operates under conditions of intensifying processes of globalization and the digital transformation of education. English is gradually assuming the role of an essential instrument of intercultural communication, which necessitates the high-quality development of foreign-language communicative skills already at the primary school age. The issue of developing speaking and listening skills as basic types of speech activity that ensure direct oral communication is becoming particularly urgent.

Recent research and practical experience demonstrate that interactive, activity-based and gamified learning formats, especially those involving digital resources, increase pupils' motivation, foster their engagement in communicative activity, stimulate cognitive processes and cultivate a sustainable interest in learning a foreign language. At the same time, the effectiveness of these approaches largely depends on the extent to which the psychological and pedagogical characteristics of younger schoolchildren are taken into account.

The problem of developing speech skills in learners in primary education has attracted the attention of many scholars. Methods of teaching foreign languages in primary school have been examined by O. Biych, S. Karavanova, L. Masenko, O. Pometun, H. Sotnykova and others, while the theoretical foundations of the development of speaking and listening skills have been analysed by N. Hez, Yu. Yermolenko, L. Skalkin and other researchers. Important guidance is also provided by contemporary psychological and pedagogical studies focusing on the developmental characteristics of younger schoolchildren [1; 2; 5–9].

The aim of the article is to analyse the psychological and pedagogical factors that determine the development of speaking and listening skills in learners in primary education and to outline effective approaches and methodological techniques for their formation in the context of the modern primary school.

**Main text.**

Overview of the external educational environment for the development of speaking and listening skills. The initial stage of learning English is of crucial importance, since it is during this period that the foundation is laid for subsequent fluent language use. It creates a basis for the formation of abilities that make effective foreign-language communication possible. At this stage, the psycholinguistic foundations of communicative competence are formed; they encompass listening, speaking, reading and writing in accordance with the requirements of the educational curriculum.

Primary education in Ukraine is organised in two cycles Grades 1-2 and Grades 3-4 which correspond to children's age-related characteristics and educational needs and help overcome disparities in pupils' initial preparedness for schooling. The main goal of foreign-language instruction in primary school is the formation of communicative competence, which is ensured by pupils' linguistic, speech and sociocultural experience and correlates with their age-related capabilities [3].

Many years of experience in teaching foreign languages attest to the effectiveness of lessons structured according to the communicative-thematic principle, which makes it possible to develop all types of speech activity within the thematic content of the curriculum. Speech activity is understood as an active, purposeful process of communication mediated by language and the communicative situation and is realised in four main types—listening, speaking, reading and writing [2].

Speaking and listening are the leading types of speech activity that ensure direct oral communication. The path of acquiring the mother tongue differs fundamentally from the process of learning a foreign language; therefore, the mechanical transfer of analogies between them is methodologically unjustified. The teaching of foreign-language speaking and listening requires the purposeful use of specific techniques that take into account the more conscious nature of language acquisition at the primary school age.

Listening is defined as listening with understanding, that is, a complex process of perceiving, comprehending and interpreting speech by ear, which goes beyond the



mere acoustic perception of sounds [5]. Speaking, in turn, is a leading type of speech activity and the principal form of realising language as a means of communication; it has an acoustic form, is perceived by the listener and is aimed at transmitting a message from the speaker to the addressee [8]. Listening and speaking function as interrelated aspects of oral communication: listening acts both as an independent type of activity and as preparation for an adequate speech response.

Input data and research methods. The theoretical basis of the article is formed by: an analysis of the State Standard of Primary General Education and the current curricula in foreign languages [3]; a synthesis of psychological and pedagogical works devoted to the age-specific characteristics of younger schoolchildren and the development of their cognitive, motivational and emotional-volitional spheres [6-8]; and studies in the methodology of teaching foreign languages, in particular the formation of foreign-language competence in listening and speaking [1, 2].

The study employs theoretical methods such as analysis, comparison and synthesis of scholarly sources; systematisation of psychological and pedagogical factors in the development of speech in younger schoolchildren; and conceptualisation of the leading methodological approaches (communicative, situational and interactive). The input data for the generalisations consist of the results of previous research and the practical experience of primary-school English teachers as described in the literature.

Research results. The development of speech at the primary school age takes place against the background of the active formation of cognitive, emotional and social skills. During this period, vocabulary expands considerably, grammatical accuracy of utterances improves, and the need for speech interaction with peers and adults increases. A characteristic feature is a high capacity for imitating speech patterns, which constitutes an important resource for mastering both the mother tongue and a foreign language. The thinking of younger schoolchildren is predominantly concrete and image-based, which necessitates reliance on visual support, games and practical actions, as well as visual schemes and illustrations. The emotional component becomes particularly significant: the learning process must be engaging and emotionally rich, since children's attention at this age is unstable and their motivation is largely



determined by external factors (praise, game-based activities, competition, the aesthetic appeal of the material) [7].

The development of imagination in early and primary school childhood is manifested in the ability to reproduce and transform images on the basis of descriptions, pictures and schemes. Creative imagination develops actively: children invent their own stories, create imaginary situations and model a “world of fantasy”, which can be effectively used in role-plays and dramatisations in a foreign language [7]. A specific feature of the development of attention is the relative weakness of voluntary attention and the predominance of involuntary attention: pupils more readily and willingly focus on new, bright, unexpected and emotionally significant material. This requires that the teacher create situations of “proximal motivation”, in which the outcome of the activity is directly important and intelligible to the learner (receiving praise, winning a game, successfully performing in front of the class, etc.).

Primary school pupils’ memory develops under the influence of learning: they find it easier to memorise concrete facts, images and events than abstract definitions and explanations. At the initial stage, elements of mechanical memorisation predominate, while the role of semantic links gradually increases [9]. The character of children of this age is typically marked by impulsivity, a need for active external activity, and emotional sensitivity and vulnerability [6; 7]. They react acutely to injustice, criticism and the emotional climate in the classroom; therefore, for the development of speaking and listening skills it is essential to ensure a benevolent, supportive atmosphere in which errors are perceived as a natural part of learning. The primary school age in general is a stage of intensive socialisation: pupils master the norms of interaction within the peer group, establish friendships and learn to reconcile their own wishes with the interests of others. The need for communication and recognition on the part of peers makes the development of skills of verbal interaction, teamwork, listening and being heard particularly relevant. An integrated set of psychological and pedagogical factors that influence the development of speaking and listening skills is presented in Figure 1.

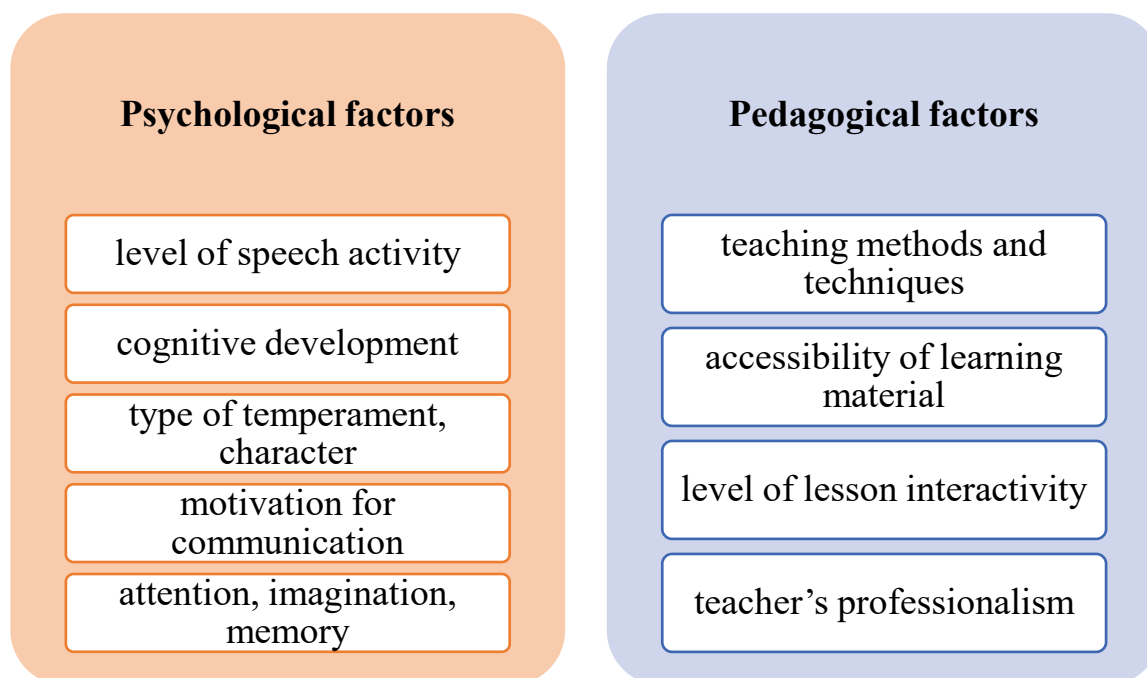


Figure 1 – Psychological and pedagogical factors in the formation of listening and speaking skills

One of the key principles in the development of speaking and listening skills is the communicative approach, which is based on genuine verbal interaction and a focus on the semantic meaningfulness of utterances. Central here is not so much formal correctness as the learner's ability to convey and comprehend meaning, respond to the interlocutor's utterance and achieve a communicative goal [1]. The principal means of implementing the communicative approach are instructional speech situations that enable pupils to become aware of the motives for communication, to take into account the characteristics of the addressee, the conditions of communication and the expected reaction. Such situational learning is understood not as the occasional use of isolated situations, but as a systematic, methodologically well-grounded approach in which the situation constitutes a permanent structural element of the lesson.

In the course of organising situational learning, pupils are involved in various types of activities that model real or close-to-real life circumstances. They act out dialogues in the format of role-plays ("customer – shop assistant", "pupil – teacher", "passenger – ticket clerk", etc.), participate in dialogic communication through questions and answers and mini-interviews, and engage in modelled speech situations supported by formulaic expressions, cue cards and illustrations. Creative tasks that



prompt independent expression—such as composing stories based on pictures, completing dialogues and staging short scenes—also play an important role. These forms of work ensure pupils' inclusion in “live” communication in which speaking and listening naturally interact and mutually condition one another: the learner not only produces utterances but also actively listens, interprets what is heard and responds accordingly.

The development of oral language skills in younger schoolchildren is closely linked to the motivational sphere. Motivation may be external, when activity is supported by positive assessment, game elements and competition, or it may be grounded in internal interest in the language, the desire to learn new things and the need to communicate with native speakers. A learner-centred approach presupposes the creation of conditions under which each child has an opportunity to express his or her own opinion, experience success and receive supportive feedback [4]. In this context, interactive learning is regarded as an organisation of the educational process in which pupils act as active subjects and co-creators of the lesson rather than passive performers. They are involved in modelling real-life situations, participating in role-plays and jointly analysing problem-solving tasks, which promotes not only the development of language skills but also the formation of value orientations, teamwork skills and an atmosphere of cooperation and mutual respect [4].

Compared with traditional forms of instruction, the interactive approach ensures more active participation of every pupil in speech interaction, creates conditions for continuous practice of listening and speaking skills and maintains a positive emotional background that reduces fear of making mistakes and fosters confidence in one's own abilities. In the course of such work, pupils gradually develop teamwork skills, the ability to perceive another person's position with tolerance, to listen to an interlocutor and to present their own opinion in an argued manner. The activity-based and emotionally saturated nature of interactive forms contributes to the effective assimilation of a considerable amount of learning material, since knowledge is embedded in the child's real experience and linked to specific communication situations, evoking personally meaningful emotions [4].



In primary-school practice, interactive methods are most often implemented through pair and small-group work (four to six pupils), which makes it possible for each child to gain real experience of participating in foreign-language communication. Within such formats, various types of exercises are organised: speech exercises aimed at practising structures (analogies, substitutions, sentence completions), creative tasks (composing poems, rhymes and mini-plays), games (lexical, grammatical and communicative), dramatisations, as well as work with songs and rhymes that combine rhythm, visual support and the repetitive use of speech patterns [8]. Taken together, these forms and methods create favourable conditions for the systematic and gradual development of speaking and listening skills in younger schoolchildren, ensuring their high level of engagement in learning and a positive attitude towards studying a foreign language.

Discussion and analysis of results

The analysis of psychological, pedagogical and methodological sources provides grounds to argue that the development of speaking and listening skills in younger schoolchildren is a complex process in which children's age-related characteristics, the organisation of the educational environment and the teacher's chosen instructional approaches are closely intertwined.

On the one hand, the psychological characteristics of this age (concrete and image-based thinking, the predominance of involuntary attention, sensitivity to the emotional climate) may complicate traditional forms of instruction oriented towards reproductive activity and the rote memorisation of rules and vocabulary lists. On the other hand, they reveal considerable potential for the use of game-based, imagistic and emotionally rich formats that naturally integrate speaking and listening: children willingly listen to engaging stories, take part in dramatisations, sing songs and communicate in role-play situations.

The communicative and situational approaches, interactive learning and learner-centred lesson organisation make it possible to maximise this potential. The creation of instructional speech situations in which the learner has a genuine communicative goal and experiences the emotional significance of the utterance enhances motivation



and promotes the development of stable speaking and listening skills.

Particular attention should also be paid to digital and gamified tools that correspond to the interests of contemporary children and make it possible to diversify learning activities. These tools can effectively combine audiovisual materials, interactive exercises and instant feedback and thus support pupils' cognitive activity and engagement in the process of foreign-language communication.

Despite the substantial theoretical elaboration of the problem, further research is required on the empirical verification of the effectiveness of different combinations of interactive and gamified methods, on optimal ways of differentiating tasks with regard to learners' individual differences, and on the specific features of developing speaking and listening skills in blended and distance-learning environments. In line with the logic of our study, the next step is an analysis of the current state of development of speaking and listening skills in primary-school learners in English lessons.

Conclusions.

The primary school age is a sensitive period for the development of foreign-language speaking and listening skills, since it is at this time that the psycholinguistic foundations of communicative competence are laid and vocabulary, grammatical accuracy of speech, communicative abilities and social interaction skills develop actively. The psychological characteristics of younger schoolchildren—concrete and image-based thinking, the predominance of involuntary attention, the dominance of visual–sensory images, impulsivity, emotional sensitivity and a high capacity for imitating speech patterns—predetermine the need to employ visual, game-based, activity-oriented and emotionally rich teaching methods that ensure pupils' natural inclusion in foreign-language communication and correspond to their age-related capabilities.

Effective development of speaking and listening skills is possible under conditions of targeted implementation of the communicative approach and situational learning, within which instructional speech situations function as a structuring element of the lesson. They provide semantic meaningfulness of utterances, orientation towards a specific addressee and the achievement of real or near-real communicative goals. An



important role in this process is played by interactive methods—pair and group work, role-plays, dramatisations, creative tasks and various game-based and gamified forms of organising activity. These methods increase learners' motivation, foster a positive emotional climate and support the formation of experience in cooperation and mutual assistance, which in turn positively affects the development of speaking and listening skills.

A crucial condition for the successful formation of oral language skills is the learner-centred organisation of the lesson, whereby every pupil has the opportunity to act as an active participant in the communicative process, to express personal opinions, to receive supportive feedback and to experience situations of academic success. Future research should focus on the empirical investigation of the level of development of speaking and listening skills in primary-school learners, on the design and piloting of sets of exercises using interactive and gamified technologies, and on substantiating the pedagogical conditions for their effective implementation in the modern primary school.

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Анотація. Статтю присвячено розвитку навичок говоріння та аудіювання в здобувачів початкової освіти в умовах глобалізації та цифрової трансформації освіти. Англійська мова розглядається як необхідний інструмент міжкультурної комунікації, що зумовлює потребу у ранньому й якісному формуванні іншомовної комунікативної компетентності. Особливу увагу зосереджено на говорінні та аудіюванні як базових видах мовленнєвої діяльності, що забезпечують безпосереднє усне спілкування.

У статті окреслено роль початкового етапу вивчення англійської мови у формуванні психолінгвістичних основ комунікативної компетентності та схарактеризовано організацію початкової освіти в Україні. Наголошено, що традиційні, переважно репродуктивні форми



навчання недостатньо узгоджуються з віковими психолого-педагогічними особливостями молодших школярів, тоді як інтерактивні та діяльнісні формати мають значний потенціал для природної інтеграції говоріння та аудіювання.

Теоретичну основу дослідження становлять аналіз Державного стандарту початкової загальної освіти та чинних програм з іноземної мови, узагальнення психолого-педагогічної літератури щодо розвитку молодших школярів, а також методичних праць з навчання іноземних мов. Використано теоретичні методи аналізу, порівняння й узагальнення наукових джерел, систематизації психолого-педагогічних чинників розвитку мовлення та концептуалізації комунікативного, ситуативного й інтерактивного підходів.

Показано, що розвиток навичок говоріння та аудіювання зумовлюється комплексною взаємодією психологічних чинників (конкретно-образне мислення, переважання мимовільної уваги, емоційна чутливість, висока здатність до наслідування) та педагогічних чинників (методи й прийоми навчання, рівень інтерактивності, професіоналізм учителя, емоційний клімат у класі). Доведено, що комунікативний підхід, реалізований через навчально-мовленнєві ситуації, у поєднанні з інтерактивними методами (робота в парах і групах, рольові ігри, інсценізації, творчі завдання) створює сприятливі умови для систематичного тренування усного мовлення, підвищує мотивацію та залученість учнів.

Обґрунтовано, що особистісно орієнтована, ситуативна й інтерактивна організація уроку дає змогу максимально використати віковий потенціал молодшого шкільного віку, тоді як цифрові та гейміфіковані інструменти урізноманітнюють види діяльності й підтримують пізнавальну активність у процесі іншомовного спілкування. Водночас окреслено потребу в емпіричних дослідженнях ефективності різних поєднань інтерактивних і гейміфікованих методик, шляхів диференціації завдань з урахуванням індивідуальних відмінностей учнів, а також особливостей формування навичок говоріння та аудіювання в умовах змішаного й дистанційного навчання.

Молодший шкільний вік визначено як сенситивний період для розвитку іншомовних навичок говоріння та аудіювання, упродовж якого закладаються психолінгвістичні основи комунікативної компетентності. Зроблено висновок про доцільність цілеспрямованої реалізації комунікативного й ситуативного підходів у поєднанні з інтерактивними та гейміфікованими методами навчання, що забезпечує формування стійких навичок усного мовлення та позитивного ставлення молодших школярів до вивчення іноземної мови. Намічено перспективи подальших досліджень, пов'язаних з емпіричною перевіркою запропонованих підходів та уточненням педагогічних умов їх ефективного застосування в сучасній початковій школі.

Ключові слова: навички говоріння; навички аудіювання; здобувачі початкової освіти; психолого-педагогічні чинники; комунікативний підхід; інтерактивне навчання; гейміфіковане навчання; англійська мова як іноземна.