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OBSAH/CONTENTS

ÚVODNÍK/EDITORIAL....4

СУЧАСНИЙ СТАН ВЗАЄМОДІЇ ЗАКЛАДУ ДОШКІЛЬНОЇ ОСВІТИ ТА СІМ`Ї У ФОРМУВАННІ ОСНОВ ЗДОРОВОГО СПОСОБУ ЖИТТЯ ДІТЕЙ ДОШКІЛЬНОГО ВІКУ
CURRENT STATE OF INTERACTION BETWEEN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION INSTITUTION AND FAMILY IN FORMING THE FUNDAMENTALS OF A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN
Вікторія АГІЛЯР ТУКЛЕР....5

ДОСВІД ДИСТАНЦІЙНОГО НАВЧАННЯ ДІТЕЙ З ОСОБЛИВИМИ ОСВІТНІМИ ПОТРЕБАМИ В ЗАКЛАДАХ ДОШКІЛЬНОЇ ОСВІТИ В УМОВАХ ВІЙНИ
EXPERIENCE OF DISTANCE LEARNING OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN WAR CONDITIONS
Наталія АНДРУЩЕНКО....16

TRANSFORMATIONS OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN'S PLAY ACTIVITIES IN UKRAINE: FROM THE PAST TO THE PRESENT
Sopfiia DOVBNIA, Halyna SHELEPKO....25

ДО ПРОБЛЕМИ ПОРУШЕНЬ ЕМОЦІЙНОЇ СФЕРИ УКРАЇНСЬКИХ ДІТЕЙ З НОРМАТИВНИМ РОЗВИТКОМ ТА З ОСОБЛИВИМИ ОСВІТНІМИ ПОТРЕБАМИ (РДУГ, РСА) В УМОВАХ ВІЙНИ
TO THE PROBLEM OF EMOTIONAL DISORDERS OF UKRAINIAN CHILDREN WITH NORMATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (ADHD, ASD) IN WAR CONDITIONS
Вікторія ГАЛЬЧЕНКО 45

ПСИХОЛОГІЧНИЙ СУПРОВІД ДІТЕЙ ТА ПЕДАГОГІВ ЗАКЛАДІВ ДОШКІЛЬНОЇ ОСВІТИ В УМОВАХ ВІЙНИ В УКРАЇНІ
PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT OF CHILDREN AND TEACHERS OF PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS DURING WAR IN UKRAINE
Віра КОРХ....55

КРОК ЗА КРОКОМ ДО УСПІХУ: ІНКЛЮЗИВНИЙ АСПЕКТ У ДОШКІЛЛІ
STEP BY STEP TO SUCCESS: INCLUSIVE ASPECT IN PRESCHOOL UKRAINE
Тетяна КОВАЛЬОВА....70

РОЛЬ ВИХОВАТЕЛЯ ЗАКЛАДІВ ДОШКІЛЬНОЇ ОСВІТИ В РОЗВИТКУ ТВОРЧОСТІ ДІТЕЙ ДОШКІЛЬНОГО ВІКУ
THE ROLE OF THE EDUCATOR OF PRESCHOOL EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVITY OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN
Тетяна КОЗАК....79

ДІЯЛЬНІСТЬ ЯК ОСНОВА РОЗВИТКУ КРИТИЧНОГО МИСЛЕННЯ ДІТЕЙ СТАРШОГО ДОШКІЛЬНОГО ВІКУ
ACTIVITY AS A BASIS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL THINKING IN CHILDREN OF SENIOR PRESCHOOL AGE
Ірина КУЗЬМЕНКО....85

FROM THE MARGINS TO THE MAINSTREAM: ADVANCING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR ALL STUDENTS
Oksana MKRTICHIAN, Oleksii NALYVAIKO, Vira LIASHCHENKO, Natalya NALYVAIKO, Larysa ZDANEVYCH....91

ЛОГОРИТМІЧНІ ЗАСОБИ РОЗВИТКУ МОВЛЕННЯ ДІТЕЙ ДОШКІЛЬНОГО ВІКУ
LOGOMETRIC TOOLS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN
Наталія САКІР....103

DETERMINING THE “SOCIAL CONTACTABILITY COEFFICIENT” OF PRESCHOOL AGE CHILDREN TO SOLVING CRISIS ISSUES CAUSED BY MODERN REALITIES
Raisa SHULYHINA, Anastasiia KOVALOVA....107

ПОДОЛАННЯ ТРИВОЖНОСТІ У ДІТЕЙ ДОШКІЛЬНОГО ВІКУ ЯК ПРОБЛЕМА В НАУКОВОМУ ПСИХОЛОГО-ПЕДАГОГІЧНОМУ ДИСКУРСІ: УКРАЇНСЬКИЙ КОНТЕКСТ
OVERCOMING ANXIETY IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN AS A PROBLEM IN SCIENTIFIC PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL DISCOURSE: UKRAINIAN CONTEXT
Раїса ШУЛИГІНА....123

THE INFLUENCE OF UKRAINIAN-LANGUAGE PRESCHOOL EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN MIDDLE PRESCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN LOCATED ABROAD
Hanna TSVIETKOVA, Nadiia KONOVALOVA....132

VYBRANÉ ASPEKTY PROFESIJNÉHO ROZVOJA UČITEĽOV
Monika MIŇOVÁ 139

THE INFLUENCE OF UKRAINIAN-LANGUAGE PRESCHOOL EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN MIDDLE PRESCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN LOCATED ABROAD

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Abstract: The article is devoted to the current issue of the role of Ukrainian-language preschool educational institutions in the development of foreign language communicative competence in middle preschool-age children who are abroad as a result of the ongoing military actions in Ukraine. It is noted that merely being in a foreign-language environment of a preschool educational institution abroad does not guarantee a child's quick and effective acquisition of a foreign language, which may result in further problems in school education. Existing scientific opinions on the factors influencing the acquisition of a foreign language by preschool-age children under the influence of a natural language environment are analyzed. Theoretical provisions regarding the interdependence between a child's languages, the influence of their individual characteristics on language acquisition success, and the general basic knowledge model are presented and analyzed. It is concluded that one of the important predictors of the successful formation of foreign language communicative competence in middle preschool-age children in immersion conditions is the development of their native language and overall cognitive development in accordance with their age. Under such conditions, it is concluded that Ukrainian-language preschool educational institutions can become a significant center for the development of children's native language, their general and cognitive development, during temporary residence abroad and attendance at foreign preschool educational institutions. An example of the implementation of this concept in the process of Ukrainian-speaking children's acquisition of a foreign language in Spain is provided through the creation of the Ukrainian-language children's development center Little Great Granada, whose purpose is to diagnose possible difficulties children face in forming foreign language communicative competence, correct and prevent factors that may contribute to these difficulties, and further overall and linguistic development of children in their native language.

Keywords: middle preschool-age children, foreign language communicative competence, preschool educational institutions, immersion method, general and cognitive development, language development.

1 Introduction

The military actions in Ukraine have brought changes to the life of every Ukrainian, including forced relocation of children outside the country. According to Eurostat (2025), as of November 2024, there were 4,234,490 citizens of Ukraine in the European Union, 32% of whom are children. This situation has led to changes in the education and development of children, including middle preschool-age children who have become pupils in foreign educational institutions. For children, this means that besides the usual directions of development, an important task has become the acquisition of a new language. In terms of its content, such acquisition is an immersion situation in the foreign language environment of a preschool educational institution, which is most appropriate for preschool-age children as it involves natural language acquisition during the sensitive period for this. However, as observations of children and surveys among parents show, staying in foreign-language environments of foreign educational institutions has different results for different children. Some children begin to speak the foreign language quite quickly and at a high level, while others do not acquire active speech in the language of the new country of residence even after a year. For the latter, in most cases, this means delays in mastering the educational programs of educational institutions, and as a result, further difficulties in school education. Under such conditions, Ukrainian preschool pedagogy faces the task of ensuring the adequate development of preschool-age children, specifically middle preschool-age children who are abroad, and finding ways to master the language of the country of residence within optimal terms. The purpose of this study is to analyze scientific achievements in the field of bilingual education,

immersion learning, and identify possible directions for helping Ukrainian children – forced migrants to other countries by Ukrainian teachers and preschool educational institutions of Ukraine. This defines the relevance of this study.

2 Materials and methods

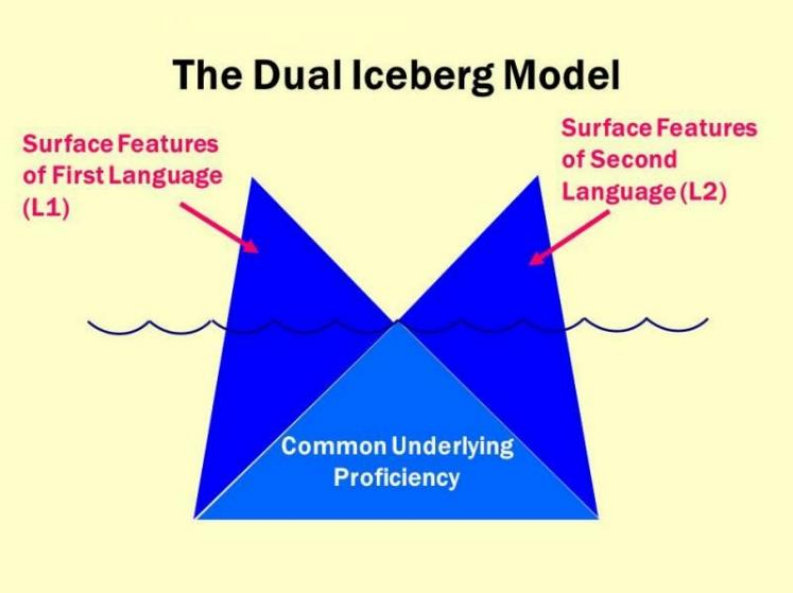
In the process of the research, a number of theoretical methods were used, such as analysis, generalization, synthesis, abstraction, and induction.

The research is based on the following theoretical achievements of world science in the field of bilingualism and language acquisition:

1. The concept of interdependence between a child's languages, which was reflected in L. Vygotsky's work "Thinking and Speech" (1962), according to which a child can transfer to a new language the system of meanings they already possess in their native language. Conversely, the foreign language contributes to mastering the higher forms of the native language. A child learns to perceive their language as one of many systems, to view its phenomena within more general categories, and this leads to the child's awareness of their own speech operations.

We are guided by the model of general basic knowledge (principle of interdependence) by J. Cummins (2021), according to which, although surface aspects (for example, pronunciation, fluency, etc.) of different languages are clearly different, there is a core cognitive/academic level of proficiency that is common across all languages. This common basic knowledge makes it possible to transfer cognitive/academic skills or skills related to literacy from one language to another. This model by J. Cummins was presented in the form of an iceberg with two peaks rising above the water separately, representing the two languages of a bilingual child; however, under the water, there is a single foundation of these peaks – general basic knowledge (Figure 1).

Fig. 1 J. Cummins' Model of General Basic Knowledge



(Source: http://emilybryantn.weebly.com/theories-of-second-language-acquisition.html)

According to the principle of interdependence, the general basic knowledge that can be transferred from one language to another includes (Cummins, 2021):

- conceptual elements (for example, the understanding of the concept of photosynthesis, which, when mastered in one language, can be considered comprehended. The concept does not change in another language; the only difference is the vocabulary, the linguistic structures required to express it in a foreign language);
- metalinguistic and metacognitive strategies (for example, visualization strategies, use of graphic organizers, mnemonic devices, vocabulary acquisition strategies);
- pragmatics (the willingness to take risks during communication in a foreign language, the ability to use paralinguistic means such as gestures to facilitate communication);
- specific linguistic elements (knowledge of the meaning of "photo" in "photosynthesis");
- phonological awareness (knowledge that words are made up of different sounds).

2. The statement on the influence of individual characteristics of a child on the success of mastering foreign language communicative competence. In particular, we adhere to scientific conclusions regarding the recognition of difficulties in mastering the native language as predictors of similar difficulties in mastering a foreign language. In this regard, we follow the Hypothesis of individual features of linguistic encoding by R. Sparks & L. Ganschow (1991, 1993, 2001), according to which mastery of both the native and foreign languages depends on the same mechanisms of language acquisition, and therefore, there is a consistent relationship between individual differences in mastering the native language and learning a foreign language; difficulties that a child encountered while mastering the native language are likely to occur in the process of mastering a foreign language. As noted by E Bates et. al. (1995) even in typically developing children, there are significant differences in language development in the native language: understanding of words, word formation, first word combinations, and the early stages of mastering grammar; moreover, there are inter-individual differences in the development of each language aspect in an individual child. E. Kidd & S. Donnelly (2020) emphasize that these differences are determined both by genetic factors and environmental factors, are stable, and do not disappear over time, thus influencing the further acquisition of a foreign language. R. Sparks et. al. (2011) highlight four main components of foreign language abilities: phonology/spelling skills (phonemic coding and ability to process phonologically); language analysis skills (understanding, grammar, vocabulary, and inductive language learning); IQ/memory skills (intelligence measures in native language and paired-associative learning by foreign language); as well as self-perception of motivation and anxiety in foreign language.

We adhere to the position regarding linguistic abilities as predictors of foreign language speech development by D. Carroll & S. Sapon (1990). They define linguistic abilities as being related to general cognitive processes and overall cognitive development. D. Carroll & S. Sapon (1959/2002) include in their composition:

- phonetic coding ability – the ability to perceive individual sounds, associate a symbol with that sound, and maintain that association.
- grammatical sensitivity – the ability to recognize the grammatical function of a lexical element (word, phrase, etc.) in a sentence without special grammar instruction.
- associative memory – the ability to memorize associations between foreign language words and their meanings and retain those associations.
- inductive learning ability – the ability to deduce or induce rules that govern the structure of a language.

Guided by the thoughts of scholars, including J. Stenberg (1998), B. McLaughlin (1990), M. Suarez (2011), who state that the aforementioned linguistic abilities are subject to development and correction through the use of specialized pedagogical-neuropsychological strategies.

For our research, we consider the scientific contributions of J. Kormos, who determined the significance of individual linguistic abilities for each specific stage of foreign language acquisition. The scholar identifies 4 stages of foreign language acquisition and the key abilities for the success of each stage (Kormos, 2013):

- *primary processing of information during its continuous perception:* working memory as a regulator of attention; phonological short-term memory, the volume of which determines the length of language fragments that students can remember; phonological sensitivity, which helps distinguish sounds and decode words; inductive abilities and metalinguistic awareness, which facilitate syntactic analysis of the incoming information;
- *memorization:* working memory;
- *integration of new knowledge:* working memory, responsible for regulating attention when processing multiple fragments of information, speed of cognitive processing, inductive abilities, metalinguistic awareness;
- *automation of new knowledge:* working memory, perceptual speed (speed of perception).

During the identification of key conditions for the formation of foreign language communicative competence in children of middle preschool age, we follow the views of F. Mendoza (2010), according to which the development of speech is influenced by both internal (neuropsychological) and external (social) factors in interaction and interdependence. The former includes the development of mental processes, mechanisms, and skills that allow the use of language as a means of communication and understanding the world. These factors are mostly common to both languages. Thus, speech is a higher mental function (Vygotsky, 2012), its development depends on the formation and maturity of brain structures, all of which participate in the process of speech production (Luria, 2012), so the formation of both the native and foreign languages requires the normal neuropsychological development of the child. The formation, consolidation, and development of the mentioned psycholinguistic structures mostly occur between the ages of 0 to 6 years (Mendoza, 2010). Among the key psychological development features that influence the formation of foreign language communicative competence in children of middle preschool age, F. Mendoza mentions: intellectual development, memory, attention, and imagination. External factors include the attitude towards the language, its prestige, recognition of its importance, which, in the child's view, manifests itself in motivation to learn foreign language.

3 Results

The conducted analysis of theoretical achievements in the field of bilingualism and language learning has allowed us to conclude that the acquisition of a foreign language by Ukrainian children of middle preschool age, who are forced migrants abroad, goes beyond the competence of educators in foreign educational institutions. The success of forming foreign language communicative competence in children also depends on the level of development of the native language and the cognitive development of the children, as well as the correspondence of their neuropsychological development to age norms. Thus, in a situation where, during the initial stages of attending foreign preschool institutions, these institutions mostly play the role of a center for acquiring a new language, *Ukrainian-speaking preschool institutions can become a space for further development of the children's native language and their cognitive and overall development, factors which, among others, are important predictors of successful foreign language acquisition.*

An example of the practical implementation of the stated idea is the creation of the Ukrainian-speaking *center for children's development Little Great Granada* in the city of Granada, Kingdom of Spain. The center's activities consisted of diagnosing the general and cognitive development of children, particularly of middle preschool age, and further teaching, educating, and developing them in their native language to ensure the necessary neuropsychological, cognitive development, and development of their native language for acquiring a high level of foreign language communicative competence.

At the initial stages of working with each child at the center, a diagnosis of the formation of higher mental functions was conducted using the neuropsychological diagnostic method by O. Kiparenko (2022), during which the following aspects were clarified: the child's general knowledge level, attention development, short-term and delayed memory, praxis, gnosis, especially phonemic hearing, spatial representations, thinking, expressive and receptive speech in the native language. Children were offered tasks such as a proofreading test, the "10 words" test, a test for reciprocal coordination, finger position praxis, oral praxis, rhythm test, simplified Benton test, tasks on analogies, generalization, understanding the meaning of a storyline picture, naming objects and their parts, and constructing a coherent narrative from a series of pictures.

Based on the results of the diagnostics, developmental sessions were conducted at the Center for children, which approximately consisted of the following content blocks:

- block of neuropsychological correction;
- block of general knowledge development;
- block of native language speech development.

Depending on the prevailing needs of a specific group of children, the neuropsychological block includes exercises and games aimed at developing attention and memory, praxis, gnosis, spatial representations, interhemispheric interaction: correction tasks, drawing with both hands, construction, mazes, cut-out pictures, simple graphic dictations, copying figures by dots, reproducing rhythmic structures, neuro gymnastics, kinesthetic fairy tales for children, exercises with kinesthetic balls and bean bags, with the Bilgou board, memorization and reproduction of words, games such as “Find the differences”, “Four elements”, “Forbidden movement”, “Nose-floor-ceiling”, “Stop”, “Show with both hands at once”, “Robot”, “Memory”, “Snowball”, “Pairs of words”, “Which word is missing”, “What did you hear”, “Echo”, “Neurodynamic sequences”, “Sort the objects”, “Do as I say, not as I show”, “Silent-whisper-loud”, “Fly”, “Listen and make noise”, “Sound lotto”, and others.

The block of general knowledge development includes familiarizing children with society, the natural environment, and logical-mathematical development in accordance with the requirements of the Educational Program for children aged 2 to 7 years “Child.”

The block of speech development in the native language involves expanding the children's vocabulary, forming grammatical correctness in speech, developing coherent speech in the native language, and monologic speech, particularly teaching the retelling of short stories and fairy tales, composing narratives from pictures or a series of story pictures, learning poems, counting rhymes, and nursery rhymes. In its work, the center follows the main tasks of speech development for children of middle preschool age, as proposed by A. Bohush (2016).

4 Discussion

The above study provided the opportunity to take a deeper look at the issue of forming foreign language communicative competence in middle preschool-aged children, using the example of Ukrainian

children-forced migrants abroad. Based on scientific conclusions regarding the interrelationship between a child's languages, the influence of individual characteristics on the success of foreign language acquisition, and the model of general basic knowledge, the research proposed the practice of using Ukrainian-language preschool institutions as a center for the development of the children's native language, as well as their general and cognitive development, as one of the means of increasing the effectiveness of foreign language communicative competence acquisition under immersion conditions. At the same time, it would be appropriate to conduct more detailed empirical studies regarding the level of effectiveness of the above-mentioned activities in Ukrainian-language educational institutions in terms of the time and extent of foreign language acquisition by middle preschool-aged children through immersion in the foreign language environment of foreign preschool institutions.

5 Conclusion

Thus, Ukrainian-language preschool institutions play an important role in the formation of foreign language communicative competence in Ukrainian children of middle preschool age. They can, in particular, become a center for the further development of the native language, as well as general and cognitive development, which are important predictors of the successful acquisition of a foreign language through the immersion method.

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