

UDC: 372.881.111.1:373.2

**THE CURRENT STATE OF TEACHING ENGLISH VOCABULARY IN
PRESCHOOL EDUCATION: AN ANALYSIS**

Ergasheva Xilola Yunusxanovna

Department of English Language and Literature

Namangan State Institute of Foreign Languages named after Is'hoqxon Ibrat,
Uzbekistan

ORCID: 0009-0002-4168-3461

E-mail: ergasevahilola81@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22787137>

Abstract. *This thesis analyses the current state of teaching English vocabulary in preschool education, with particular attention to the context of Uzbekistan. Drawing on international scholarship on young language learners and on recent educational reforms, the paper argues that early vocabulary instruction has shifted decisively towards meaning-focused, multisensory and play-based approaches — above all Total Physical Response, storytelling, songs and games — grounded in comprehensible input and receptive-before-productive learning. At the same time, the analysis identifies a persistent gap between declared methodology and classroom reality: a shortage of specially trained preschool English teachers, the absence of an age-appropriate vocabulary syllabus, limited authentic materials and the residual influence of translation-based instruction. The paper concludes that the field is in a transitional stage in which favourable policy conditions are not yet matched by methodological and human-resource capacity.*

Keywords: *preschool education, English vocabulary, young learners, Total Physical Response, comprehensible input, play-based learning, Uzbekistan, early foreign-language teaching.*

Annotatsiya: *Mazkur tezisdagi maktabgacha ta’limda ingliz tili leksikasini o’qitishning hozirgi holati, xususan, O’zbekiston kontekstida tahlil qilinadi. Kichik yoshdagi til o’rganuvchilar bo’yicha xalqaro ilmiy tadqiqotlar hamda so’nggi ta’lim islohotlariga tayangan holda, erta yoshda lug’at boyligini o’rgatish mazmunga yo’naltirilgan, multisensor va o’yinga asoslangan yondashuvlar, xususan, Total Physical Response (TPR), hikoya qilish, qo’shiqlar va o’yinlar tomon izchil siljiganligi asoslab beriladi. Ushbu yondashuvlar tushunarli kiruvchi til materiali (comprehensible input) hamda avval retseptiv, keyin produktiv o’rganish tamoyiliga asoslanadi. Shu bilan birga, tadqiqotda metodologik yondashuvlar bilan amaliy mashg’ulotlar o’rtasida saqlanib qolayotgan tafovut ham aniqlanadi. Jumladan, maktabgacha ta’lim uchun maxsus tayyorgarlikka ega ingliz tili o’qituvchilarining yetishmasligi, yosh xususiyatlariga mos lug’at dasturining mavjud emasligi, autentik materiallarning cheklanganligi hamda tarjimaga asoslangan o’qitish usulining saqlanib qolayotgan ta’siri shular jumlasidandir. Xulosa qilib aytganda, mazkur soha o’tish bosqichida bo’lib, unda ta’lim siyosati uchun yaratilgan qulay sharoitlar hali metodik va inson resurslari salohiyati bilan to’liq uyg’unlashmagan.*

Kalit so’zlar: *maktabgacha ta’lim, ingliz tili leksikasi, kichik yoshdagi til o’rganuvchilar, Total Physical Response, tushunarli kiruvchi til materiali, o’yinga asoslangan ta’lim, O’zbekiston, chet tilini erta o’qitish.*

Аннотация: В данной статье анализируется современное состояние обучения английской лексике в дошкольном образовании, с особым вниманием к контексту Узбекистана. Основываясь на международных исследованиях в области обучения языку детей младшего возраста и последних образовательных реформах, автор обосновывает, что обучение лексике на раннем этапе последовательно сместилось в сторону смысло-ориентированных, мультисенсорных и игровых подходов, прежде всего *Total Physical Response (TPR)*, рассказывания историй, песен и игр, основанных на принципе понятного языкового ввода (*comprehensible input*) и последовательности «сначала рецептивное, затем продуктивное усвоение». Вместе с тем в исследовании выявляется сохраняющийся разрыв между заявленной методологией и реальной практикой занятий: нехватка специально подготовленных преподавателей английского языка для дошкольного образования, отсутствие соответствующей возрасту программы по лексике, ограниченное использование аутентичных материалов и сохраняющееся влияние обучения, основанного на переводе. В заключение отмечается, что данная сфера находится на переходном этапе, когда благоприятные условия, созданные образовательной политикой, пока не в полной мере обеспечены соответствующим методическим и кадровым потенциалом.

Ключевые слова: дошкольное образование, английская лексика, дети младшего возраста, *Total Physical Response*, понятный языковой ввод, игровое обучение, Узбекистан, раннее обучение иностранному языку.

Introduction

The lowering of the starting age for foreign-language learning is one of the most visible global trends in language education. Preschool age (roughly three to six years) is increasingly regarded not as a period of premature instruction but as a sensitive window for the intuitive acquisition of a foreign language, especially at the level of sound and word. Within early foreign-language education, vocabulary occupies a central position: unlike grammar, which young children cannot yet analyse consciously, individual words can be linked directly to objects, actions and emotions, and therefore constitute the natural entry point into a new language [1; 2].

This general trend is clearly reflected in Uzbekistan. Over the past decade the country has undertaken large-scale reforms of early childhood education: the participation rate one year before primary school rose from 28% in 2016 to 84% in 2024, while net enrolment across the whole preschool age group increased from 20% in 2016 to 69% in 2025 [3]. In parallel, successive policy measures have promoted the spread of English throughout the education system and have created strong institutional demand for early English provision [4]. Against this background, the question of how English vocabulary is actually taught to preschool children — and how far current practice matches contemporary methodology — becomes both timely and practically significant. The aim of this thesis is to analyse the current state of teaching English vocabulary in preschool education and to identify the principal tensions within it.

Contemporary methodological approaches

Contemporary scholarship converges on a clear principle: for preschool learners, vocabulary is best acquired through meaning-focused, multisensory and play-based activity rather than through explicit study or translation. Comprehension is expected to precede production, and rich comprehensible input is treated as the engine of early acquisition [5]. Several methods dominate current practice.

Total Physical Response (TPR) occupies the leading position. Introduced by J. Asher, TPR links new words to physical actions, allowing children to demonstrate understanding through movement before they are required to speak [6]. Empirical studies consistently report gains in vocabulary retention and engagement when TPR is used with five- to six-year-olds, precisely because it aligns with children's sensorimotor stage of development [7].

TPR Storytelling, songs, chants and games extend this logic. Storytelling embeds target words in a meaningful, repeated narrative; songs and rhythmic chants exploit melody and repetition to fix pronunciation and word form; games introduce the emotional engagement and low anxiety that young children require. Across these techniques the shared mechanism is the same — frequent, contextualised and emotionally positive exposure to a limited set of high-frequency words.

Two further tendencies characterise the current state. First, digital and multimedia resources — animated flashcards, interactive songs and simple applications — are increasingly integrated into vocabulary work, adding visual and auditory reinforcement. Second, there is a broad methodological consensus that early vocabulary should be thematic and concrete (family, animals, colours, numbers, food, toys), taught in small cyclical portions and constantly recycled. A compact summary of the dominant methods and their analytical characteristics is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Dominant approaches to preschool English vocabulary and their characteristics

Approach	Core mechanism	Analytical note
Total Physical Response	Word linked to physical action; comprehension before production	Strongest evidence base for ages 5–6; reduces anxiety
TPR Storytelling	Target words embedded in a repeated narrative	Adds context and sequence; supports early oral fluency
Songs and chants	Melody and rhythm fix form and pronunciation	High engagement; risk of formulaic, unanalysed recall
Games and play	Emotional engagement, low-anxiety repetition	Effective if vocabulary goals are explicit, not incidental
Digital / multimedia	Visual–auditory reinforcement	Useful supplement; depends on teacher mediation

The current state in the Uzbek context and its tensions

When these approaches are examined against the reality of preschool classrooms, a characteristic gap emerges between declared methodology and everyday practice. The analysis identifies four interrelated tensions.

First, a shortage of specialised teachers. Teaching a foreign language to very young children demands a distinct competence that combines early-childhood pedagogy with language teaching. Reviews of English teaching in Uzbekistan repeatedly note a deficit of qualified teachers and insufficient professional development for learner-centred methods, and this deficit is most acute at preschool level, where dedicated training programmes remain scarce [4].

Second, the residue of translation-based instruction. Although policy documents and teacher trainers endorse communicative, activity-based methodology, classroom practice still gravitates towards grammar-translation habits and rote memorisation [4]. At preschool level this manifests as the mechanical repetition of isolated words divorced from action and context — precisely the practice that contemporary methodology seeks to replace.

Third, the absence of an age-appropriate vocabulary syllabus. There is no widely adopted, developmentally graded lexical minimum specifying which words a preschool child should acquire, in what sequence and to what depth. As a result, vocabulary selection is often left to individual teachers or to imported materials that are not adapted to local children's experience, weakening both systematic recycling and assessment.

Fourth, limited authentic materials and assessment tools. Suitable picture books, songs and games adapted to the Uzbek preschool context remain in short supply, and age-appropriate, play-based means of assessing early vocabulary are largely absent. Consequently, learning outcomes are difficult to monitor, and successful practice depends heavily on the initiative of individual educators rather than on a shared system.

Conclusion

The analysis indicates that teaching English vocabulary in preschool education is in a transitional stage. At the level of theory and policy the direction is clear and favourable: a strong international consensus supports meaning-focused, multisensory and play-based vocabulary instruction, and in Uzbekistan this is reinforced by rapid expansion of preschool coverage and by determined promotion of early English. At the level of practice, however, this potential is not yet fully realised. Progress is constrained by a shortage of specially trained preschool English teachers, the persistence of translation-based habits, the lack of a developmentally graded vocabulary syllabus and a deficit of adapted materials and assessment tools.

It follows that the priority tasks for the field are not the discovery of new methods but the consolidation of existing ones: targeted preparation of preschool English teachers, the development of a graded thematic vocabulary minimum, the creation of locally adapted play-based materials, and the design of age-appropriate assessment. Addressing these tasks would allow the favourable policy environment to translate into consistent classroom outcomes and would provide a firm empirical basis for subsequent research.

References

1. Cameron L. Teaching Languages to Young Learners. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 258 p.
2. Nation I.S.P. Learning Vocabulary in Another Language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 477 p.
3. UNESCO. Global Education Monitoring Report — Uzbekistan country case study. Paris: UNESCO, 2026.
4. Hasanova D. English in Uzbekistan: language ideologies and teaching practices // International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 2025. DOI: 10.1515/ijsl-2024-0117.
5. Krashen S.D. The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications. London: Longman, 1985. 120 p.
6. Asher J.J. Learning Another Language Through Actions. Los Gatos, CA: Sky Oaks Productions, 1977.

**“Pedagogik ta’lim va tarbiya
transformatsiyasida fundamental,
amaliy va innovatsion
tadqiqotlarning konseptual
asoslari” mavzusidagi Xalqaro
ilmiy-amaliy anjuman materilalari
to‘plami**



23.06.2026

**Proceedings of the International
Scientific and Practical
Conference on “Conceptual
Foundations of Fundamental,
Applied, and Innovative
Research in the Transformation
of Pedagogical Education and
Upbringing”**

7. Duan Y. The application of Total Physical Response method (TPR) in preschool children's English teaching // Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 2021, vol. 11, no. 10, pp. 1323–1333. DOI: 10.17507/tpls.1110.22.

8. Pinter A. Teaching Young Language Learners. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. 204 p.