

OANA STOICAN

University of Bucharest
oana.stoican@fpse.unibuc.ro
ORCID 0000 0003 0536 5466

CORNELIA ȘTEFĂNESCU

University of Bucharest
cornelia.stefanescu@fpse.unibuc.ro
ORCID 0009 0005 9423 9286

VALERIU ȘTEFĂNESCU

University of Bucharest
valeriu.stefanescu@fpse.unibuc.ro
ORCID 0009 0002 0831 9959

Effective Training Methods and Techniques in the Development of Oral Communication Skills of Primary and Preschool Children

Summary

One of the key skills promoted by the European Commission is communication skills, which are essential in a global world where the focus is on representing, interpreting and understanding reality using language as a tool. Actually, representing a category of competences, communication competence is a key element from the first years of life, which contributes to the child's success in various situations of existence, in the family, in free time, etc., but also in the school environment. Formally and organised in kindergarten and school, the child learns to use language as a tool of oral and written communication to receive and transmit information, ideas, beliefs, feelings and various opinions, to influence and trigger certain behaviours, and to interact with others appropriately and creatively.

The study we propose aims to identify a set of effective methods and techniques in forming communication competence, with which students in the field of Education Sciences start their future teaching career as teachers for primary and preschool education. Thus, based on the investigation of a sample of 142 respondents and referring to the specialised literature, we aim to present an inventory of relevant methods and techniques, as well as the impact they have in teaching practice.

Keywords: communication competence, teaching methods and techniques, primary and preschool education, language acquisition.

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2023

[https://doi.org/
10.37384/
SM.2023.15.084](https://doi.org/10.37384/SM.2023.15.084)

EFEKTĪVAS APMĀCĪBAS METODEDES UN PAŅĒMIENI SĀKUMSKOLAS UN PIRMSSKOLAS VECUMA BĒRNU MUTVĀRDU KOMUNIKĀCIJAS PRASMJU ATTĪSTĪBĀ

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Kopsavilkums

Viena no galvenajām prasmēm, ko veicina Eiropas Komisija, ir komunikācijas prasme, kas ir būtiska globālajā pasaulē, kur liela uzmanība tiek pievērsta realitātes attēlošanai, interpretācijai un izpratnei, izmantojot valodu kā rīku. Faktiski pārstāvot kompetenču kategoriju, komunikācijas kompetence ir galvenais elements jau no pirmajiem dzīves gadiem, tas veicina bērna panākumus dažādās dzīves situācijās, ģimenē, brīvajā laikā utt., arī skolas vidē. Formāli un organizēti bērnudārzā un skolā bērns mācās lietot valodu kā mutvārdu un rakstveida saziņas līdzekli, lai saņemtu un nodotu informāciju, paustu idejas, uzskatus, jūtas un dažādus viedokļus, ietekmētu un izraisītu noteiktu uzvedību, mijiedarbotos ar citiem atbilstošā un radošā veidā.

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Mūsu piedāvātā pētījuma mērķis ir identificēt efektīvu metožu un paņēmieni kopumu komunikācijas kompetences veidošanā, ar kuru palīdzību izglītības zinātņu nozares studenti sāk savu turpmāko pedagoga karjeru kā sākumskolas un pirmsskolas izglītības skolotāji. Tādējādi, pamatojoties uz 142 respondentu izlases izpēti un atsaucoties uz specializēto literatūru, mūsu mērķis ir iepazīstināt ar atbilstošām metodēm un paņēmieniem, kā arī to ietekmi uz mācīšanas procesu.

Raksturvārdi: komunikācijas kompetence, mācību metodes un paņēmieni, sākumskolas un pirmsskolas izglītība, valodas apguve.

I. Introduction

According to the European Commission (CE 2007), key competences represent a transferable and multifunctional package of knowledge, skills and attitudes that all individuals, regardless of age, need for personal development, social inclusion and professional insertion.

The basis of permanent education, the competences have an implicit transdisciplinary character, representing the educational purposes of compulsory education that determine the student's training profile.

One of the eight key competences promoted by the European Commission is the competence to communicate in the mother tongue, which is essential in a global world where the emphasis is on representing, interpreting and understanding reality using language as a tool. Communication competence is a key element from the first years of life, contributing to the child's success in various situations of existence, in the family, in free time, etc., and also in the school environment. This first competence represents the

ability to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in oral and written form, and also to interact in an appropriate way in various situations.

Throughout schooling, the ability to communicate in the mother tongue aims at the status of language as a tool, both in its oral and written use, and as a way of representing, interpreting and understanding reality, playing a significant role in shaping thinking and behaviours, in the willingness to interact in an appropriate and creative way.

At the level of primary education in Romania, the language and communication curriculum targets in different proportions knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that lead to the formation of communication competence in the mother tongue. Regarding oral communication, two main directions are followed, of receiving and expressing an oral message in different contexts.

Receiving oral messages in familiar communication contexts involves:

- identifying the meaning of an oral message on familiar themes;
- identifying various information from a message;
- identification of sounds, syllables, and words in verbal statements;
- expressing interest in receiving oral messages, in known communication contexts;
- making deductions based on listening to an accessible literary or informative text;
- deducing the meaning of a word by referring to the message heard in certain communication contexts, familiar and predictable;
- notifying some regularities of the language in overheard messages and some deviations with the aim of correcting them;
- showing interest in receiving the oral message regardless of channel disturbances.

The expression of oral messages in various communication situations involves:

- clear pronunciation of sounds and words in simple statements;
- formulating own statements in various communication situations;
- the transmission of information about oneself and the nearby universe through short, simple messages, through a suite of logically chained utterances;
- participating with interest in dialogues, in different communication contexts;

– expressing one's own ideas regarding familiar contexts, showing interest in communication and self-confidence;

– description of an object/a being from the nearby universe based on a simple plan or a character from a book/from a movie/an imaginary character following a set of landmarks;

– narrating a known event based on adequate support and or recounting an imagined event based on supporting questions;

– logically and chronologically ordered presentation of an activity carried out individually or in a group, of a project/an activity carried out in school or extracurricular;

– participating in interactions to find solutions to individual or group problems;

– adapting speech to different communication situations depending on the dialogue partner.

Regarding preschool education, the curriculum for early education puts a special emphasis on the concept of global child development, in the context where the child's preparation for school and for life must take into account both academic skills and social development – emotional, cognitive, physical, language and communication development, learning capacities and attitudes (curiosity and interest, initiative, persistence, creativity). Thus, the programme capitalises on the curricular paradigm centred on competences, respectively, on the acquisition of behaviours that ensure the prerequisites for the development of key competences later. The axis of the programme for early education is constituted by the areas of development (physical development, health and personal hygiene; socio-emotional development; capacities and attitudes towards learning; development of language, communication and the premises of reading and writing; cognitive development and knowledge of the world) developmental dimensions and behaviours, as prerequisites for subsequent skills. Between all areas of development, there are dependencies and interdependencies so that each acquisition in one area significantly influences the child's progress in the other areas.

The field of development of language, communication and the premises of reading and writing aims at the development of language (under the aspects of vocabulary, grammar, syntax, but also of understanding the meaning), of communication (including listening skills, oral and written, non-verbal and verbal communication) and pre-acquisitions for reading-writing and accompanies the development in each of the other fields.

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Regarding oral communication, the curriculum provides:

- 1) responsive communication, through practising, with support, active listening to a message, in order to understand and receive it;
- 2) expressive communication, through:
 - demonstrating the understanding of an oral message, as a result of the exploitation of ideas, emotions, meanings, etc.;
 - demonstrating the ability to clearly communicate ideas, needs, curiosities, actions, own emotions;
 - compliance with the rules of correct expression in different communication contexts;
 - progressive expansion of vocabulary.

By listening and speaking in group situations, preschoolers become able to explore other people's experiences and thus expand their repertoire of meaningful experiences. It is intended that they speak and express themselves with confidence, clearly and fluently, using appropriate means of expression for different categories of audiences.

Verbal interaction is a formal or informal oral communication situation that engages students in verbal exchanges in which they provide information, express emotions or feelings, formulate questions or instructions, cooperate on a project, and solve problems (VanGundy 2005) while providing attention and feedback to others. This oral communication competence, formed within the lessons and specific communication activities, is essential in the didactic process of all subjects in the curriculum.

Interactive teaching is largely based on vertical and horizontal verbal exchanges, communication between students allowing them to react to what the teacher conveys to them in terms of ideas, experience and knowledge, to express their points of view, but also to accept the different opinions of other colleagues (Seaman, Fellenz 1989). Students can learn from their peers or the teacher to develop social skills, organise their thoughts, and develop rational arguments (Barkley, Major, Cross 2005).

Such teaching allows the use of interactive methods, which facilitate face-to-face discussions with the whole group of students/preschoolers, small group discussions, group projects or in pairs (Johnson, Johnson 1989). It is essential that the teacher specifies the topic, the duration of the discussion, the composition and size of the groups, as well as the ways of communication. Interactive teaching requires the teacher and the student to perfect the skills and techniques of observation, listening and intervention (Kagan 1994).

Among the interactive teaching methods, those aimed at training oral communication skills necessarily assume an active-participative component that gives dynamism and the involvement of all participants from the position of speaker or listener (Bocoș 2013; Buehl 2017). Even if only partially during the lessons and activities, well-defined moments involving debates, role-plays, cooperative learning, brainstorming and discussions are integrated.

II. Research methodology

1. The purpose, objectives and hypothesis of the research

The study we propose aims to identify a set of effective methods and techniques for forming communication competence, with which students in the field of Education Sciences start their future teaching career as teachers for primary and preschool education.

The objectives of the research were:

- revealing students' perception of the effectiveness of training methods and techniques in the formation of oral communication skills of primary school and preschool students;
- identifying a set of methods and techniques for training oral communication skills suitable for the specifics of each level of education (primary/preschool);
- revealing the impact of the identified methods and techniques in teaching practice at the level of verbal communication components.

Starting from these objectives, the idea can be deduced that in the formation of listening and speaking behaviour, some methods and techniques used in the instructional-educational process have different relevance in relation to the schooling level and the directions drawn by each individual curriculum.

In order to verify the above hypothesis, a survey was conducted between March and April 2024, using the questionnaire as a tool for data collection.

This questionnaire was addressed to a pre-existing sample of the research, consisting of students from all three years of study. In addition to the identification data, the questionnaire covered aspects related to: the main factors according to which teachers use interactive methods in the didactic process, in order to train oral communication skills, the frequency with which interactive teaching-learning methods are used, the identification of methods effective interactive methods for training the main components of oral communication competence, as well as the behaviours

observed in students and preschoolers in oral communication activities where interactive methods are used.

2. The sample of subjects

The investigation was conducted on the basis of a sample of 142 respondents, students of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences from the University of Bucharest, the Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education study programme.

The structure of the sample is as follows:

Table 1.

The sample of subjects

<i>The year of study</i>	<i>Number of students</i>
I	50
II	49
III	43
<i>The age:</i>	
19–22 years	95
23–30 years	30
over 31 years	17
<i>Employed in the education system</i>	
<i>Level of education</i>	
primary	20
preschool	42
<i>Seniority in education:</i>	
beginners	40
3–10 years	14
11–20 years	6
over 20 years	2

As can be seen in the previous table, the sample of subjects has diverse characteristics. Among the respondents are teachers with more or less significant experience in the department (who graduated from a pedagogical high school that allowed them to teach), as well as students in the process of initial training. The latter base their opinions exclusively on the pedagogical practice activities they participate in during their university studies, both at primary and preschool levels. The approach offered a double perspective on the investigated problem because answers were collected from both the practitioners' and observers' points of view during the training process.

Another relevant indicator is seniority in education and experience at the department, allowing the respondents to have a well-defined opinion on the investigated subject. 20 subjects carry out their activity at the primary education level and 42 of them at the level of preschool education.

III. Data analysis and interpretation

Questioned about the main factors according to which teachers use interactive methods in the didactic process in order to train oral communication skills, the respondents identified the following:

<i>Factors according to which interactive methods are chosen</i>	<i>Number of students</i>	
the purposes of the instructive-educational process	130	EFEKTĪVAS APMĀCĪBAS
learning content	115	METODES
the specifics of the class/group	97	UN PAŅĒMIENI
available time	102	SĀKUMSKOLAS
the necessary material resources	110	UN PIRMSSKOLAS
teaching style	82	VECUMA BĒRNU
the specificity of the method	74	MUTVĀRDU
other factors (the classroom space, the participants' current state in the teaching act, the positioning of the lesson in the schedule of the day and week, etc.)	54	KOMUNIKĀCIJAS PRASMJU ATTĪSTĪBĀ

Synthesising the answers above, we deduce that one of the main factors according to which teachers choose their interactive methods in lessons or activities carried out with preschoolers is the purpose of the teaching process (skills, objectives) (130), followed by the contents of learning (115) and the necessary material resources (110). This fact is justified by the importance of the goals of the educational process in the selection of didactic strategies, as well as the curricular contents targeted in the activities carried out. Also significant are the material resources that are necessary to put the methods into practice. Given that some interactive methods are time-consuming, a relevant aspect in their selection is also the duration of their implementation within the lessons/activities (102). At the same time, 97 students indicate that the teachers take into account the specifics of the class/group when establishing their teaching strategy, taking into account the heterogeneity of the group from different perspectives: learning ability, the number of students or preschoolers, simultaneous classes or combined groups, the integration of children with special educational requirements. Another variable on which the option for a certain method depends is the teacher's teaching style (82), which reflects his personality.

A factor that should be considered is the specificity of the methods, with 74 respondents indicating this aspect as relevant. Apart from these elements emphasised by a significant number of respondents, other relevant factors were also specified in the process of choosing interactive training methods, such as the space

of the classroom, the current state of the participants in the didactic act, the positioning of the lesson in the day's programme and of the week etc.

Respondents were asked to specify, on a four-step scale, the frequency with which primary and preschool teachers use certain interactive methods in teaching activities through which oral communication skills are formed. The collected data is reflected in the following table:

Table 3.

Frequency of using interactive methods

<i>Interactive methods</i>	<i>The frequency of using the methods at the primary level</i>				<i>The frequency of using the methods at the preschool level</i>			
	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>Very rare</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Frequent</i>	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>Very rare</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Frequent</i>
	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Reciprocal Teaching</i>	10	35	38	42	130	10	2	0
<i>Cubing</i>	0	12	30	100	0	30	41	71
<i>The role play</i>	0	16	46	80	0	0	32	110
<i>Rolestorming</i>	10	46	47	39	5	35	64	38
<i>Brainstorming</i>	4	53	54	31	39	41	47	15
<i>Thinking Hats</i>	11	24	24	83	15	32	51	44
<i>Gallery Walk</i>	36	27	35	44	43	38	46	15
<i>Share-pair circles</i>	42	63	37	0	45	57	40	0
<i>Lotus</i>	45	44	53	0	62	49	31	0
<i>Starbursting</i>	0	10	37	95	0	45	55	42
<i>Snowball</i>	56	44	42	0	72	45	25	0
<i>Fishbowl</i>	54	51	37	0	78	64	0	0
<i>Didactic game</i>	0	23	85	34	0	0	51	91
<i>Round Table</i>	52	57	33	0	74	70	0	0
<i>Round Robin</i>	67	45	25	5	78	58	6	0

From the analysis of the options table, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- a number of methods are used with a high frequency at both levels of schooling: the cube, and the role-playing game, because being versatile, they can be exploited, at both levels, both cognitively and playfully;
- a number of methods are not used with high frequency either at the primary nor at the preschool level (Share-pair circles, Lotus, Snowball, Fishbowl, Round Table, Round Robin), being more complex, requiring more elaborate preparation and assuming a longer deployment time;
- some methods are more effective in primary education and less so in preschool because some involve a component of written communication, which is not primarily formed in kindergarten (Starbursting, Thinking Hats), and others involve a type of interaction at an elevated level in which students assume the role of trainers;

– other methods (role play, didactic game) are better represented at the level of preschool education because they assume an accentuated playful component, which in primary education, with time, is overtaken by the interest in knowledge;

– in some methods (Brainstorming, Rolestorming, Gallery Walk), there is a balance at the level of respondents' options both in primary and preschool education, determined by a series of factors related to the subjects of the educational action (level of language development, age, creative potential, critical thinking) (Steele, Meredith, Temple 1998).

The concept of oral communication competence translates into a series of behaviours that children/students should develop during the two levels of schooling. These oral communication skills translate into understanding and formulating an oral message, correct pronunciation, training phonemic hearing, interest in speaking and active listening, the ability to notice the norms of the language reflected in concrete communication in different contexts, and adapting the message to different communicative situations. For each component of oral communication, a number of interactive methods can be accessed at different times and according to needs, to ensure the effective training of these communication skills and attitudes. Thus, for the two levels of education, the subjects identified the most effective interactive methods in the didactic activity:

Table 4.

The effectiveness of interactive methods in the formation of oral communication competence

<i>The main components of oral communication competence</i>	<i>Efficient interactive methods – primary level</i>	<i>Efficient interactive methods – preschool level</i>
<i>Comprehension of a message and varied information in different oral communication contexts</i>	Brainstorming, Rolestorming, Reciprocal Teaching Starbursting	The role play Starbursting
<i>Appropriate formulation through correct, clear and logical utterances in different communication contexts</i>	Cubing, Thinking Hats, Reciprocal Teaching Starbursting	The role play Starbursting
<i>Phonemic hearing – identifying the phonetic form of the oral message: sounds, syllables, words</i>	Didactic game	Didactic game
<i>Correct and clear pronunciation of an oral message</i>	The role play	The role play
<i>Stimulating interest in receiving an oral message</i>	The role play, Rolestorming, Gallery Walk, Cubing	The role play Cubing
<i>Stimulating interest in producing an oral message and participating in dialogues</i>	The role play, Rolestorming, Gallery Walk	The role play
<i>Noticing some regularities of the language in different contexts</i>	Starbursting	Didactic game
<i>Adapting speech to different communicative situations</i>	Didactic game	The role play

From the collected data, we observe that, at the preschool level, the most effective methods in the formation of oral communication skills are the didactic game and the role-playing game, methods which, through the playful component, easily and naturally make the curricular contents accessible. This also extends to the first grades of primary education, when the emphasis is placed on the formation of phonemic hearing and correct pronunciation, with didactic play and role play being the fundamental methods used for these purposes. Regarding the expression and reception of the oral message, among primary school students, the most effective interactive methods were Brainstorming, Rolestorming, Reciprocal Teaching, Cubing, Thinking Hats and Starbursting. Interest in oral communication, both in terms of receiving and issuing, is stimulated through The role play, Rolestorming, Gallery Walk and Cubing. The system of linguistic norms, intuitively assimilated since kindergarten and the pre-grammatical period of primary education, is made accessible through Starbursting and Didactic game. On the other hand, the child forms an essential skill from the position of future communicator, that of adapting to the communication context, and this is most often facilitated by The role play.

As for the behaviours observed in students and preschoolers in oral communication activities where interactive methods are used, the respondents identified: increased interest in oral communication, improvement of oral communication capacity (fluency of expression, nuance), effective involvement in verbal interactions, respecting communication conventions, increasing the ability to observe details, initiative in verbalization, openness to expressing points of view, involvement in teamwork.

IV. Conclusions

In conclusion, interactive methods play a particularly important role in the formation of oral communication competence from the first years of formal education, as they promote an active involvement of all participants, to varying degrees, facilitating a collaborative, dynamic and friendly learning environment. At the same time, these methods also contribute to the formation and improvement of listening skills, stimulating the ability to provide constructive feedback and favouring the conscious and active co-participation of students. They learn not alongside each other but in relationships and together with others, each student being able to play the role of “centre” of communication.

By proposing interactive methods, the teaching staff encourages the children to have an open, active, interactive relationship and active communication attitude based on personal initiatives, as well as on their abilities to successfully deal with the complex situations they face (Crawford et al. 2005). The child asserts himself and, at the same time, capitalises on the existence of the other, teacher or colleague, as an opportunity and a chance to discover an unknown side, another point of view.

The surveyed students noted that in lessons or activities where interactive methods are used, students/children are more engaged, more involved, enthusiastic, and relaxed, seeing the whole lesson as a story in which they themselves are the heroes of the action.

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