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DEVELOPING CREATIVE ABILITIES OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN IN THE PROCESS OF INSTRUCTIONAL ACTIVITIES

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Abstract
This article analyzes theoretical foundations and practical approaches to developing creative abilities of preschool children within instructional activities. The study substantiates the effectiveness of play-based learning, problem-based situations, and creative tasks in fostering creativity, imagination, and independent thinking. The findings indicate that systematically organized creative activities significantly enhance children's divergent thinking, verbal expression, and инициативность.

Keywords: Creativity, preschool education, creative abilities, play-based learning, problem-based learning, instructional activities.

Introduction

In contemporary education systems, fostering creativity is widely recognized as a core competence for lifelong learning and personal development, as reflected in international educational frameworks that define creativity as one of the key 21st-century skills required for adaptability in rapidly changing social and professional environments. Early childhood (ages 3–6) is considered a sensitive period for the formation of cognitive, emotional, and creative potential due to the high neuroplasticity of the developing brain, during which neural connections related to imagination, language, and executive functions are formed most intensively. Empirical studies in developmental psychology indicate that children who are systematically engaged in creative and play-based activities demonstrate higher levels of divergent thinking, verbal fluency, and cognitive flexibility in later stages of education.

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Research in developmental psychology and pedagogy consistently emphasizes that creativity emerges through social interaction, symbolic play, and meaningful activity embedded in the child's cultural environment. According to sociocultural theory, creative thinking develops as children internalize socially mediated experiences and transform them into individual cognitive processes. Foundational ideas related to imagination, cognitive development, and multiple intelligences are articulated in the works of Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, and Howard Gardner. Vygotsky demonstrated that imaginative activity originates in social interaction and is closely connected with play as the leading activity of preschool age [1]. Piaget empirically showed that children in the preoperational stage actively construct knowledge through symbolic play, which serves as a cognitive foundation for creative thinking [2]. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences provides evidence that creativity is not limited to a single cognitive domain but manifests across linguistic, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal modalities, which should be systematically supported in preschool educational environments [3].

The relevance of the present study is determined by the growing demand to modernize preschool instructional practices in accordance with contemporary educational standards and research-based evidence. Traditional reproductive learning models, which prioritize memorization and the reproduction of ready-made knowledge, have been shown to limit children's initiative and creative expression. In contrast, child-centered and play-based pedagogical approaches have been empirically associated with higher levels of intrinsic motivation, engagement in learning activities, and creative problem-solving skills in early childhood. Therefore, there is a scientifically grounded need to redesign instructional activities in preschool education toward creative, interactive, and developmentally appropriate models that support the holistic development of the child and lay a foundation for innovative thinking in later stages of education.

Creativity in preschool children is understood as the ability to generate original ideas, apply imagination, and find non-standard solutions in playful and cognitive activities. According to Lev Vygotsky, imagination is not an inborn ability but develops through the internalization of social experience and cultural interaction. He emphasized that pretend play creates a "zone of proximal development," where children go beyond their actual abilities and experiment with new roles,

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rules, and meanings. Through interaction with peers and adults, children learn to transform real-life experiences into symbolic representations, which directly contributes to creative thinking.

Similarly, Jean Piaget demonstrated that preschool children are in the preoperational stage of cognitive development, characterized by symbolic thinking, egocentrism, and active use of imagination. During this stage, children actively construct knowledge through play, imitation, and exploration. Pretend play, drawing, storytelling, and role-playing allow children to experiment with ideas, test hypotheses in a safe environment, and flexibly combine reality with fantasy. Such activities stimulate divergent thinking, which is a core component of creativity.

From a multiple intelligences perspective, Howard Gardner argued that creativity is not limited to artistic expression but manifests across various domains, including linguistic, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences. In preschool education, this implies that creativity should be nurtured through diverse activities: storytelling and conversations (linguistic), construction and visual arts (spatial), music and rhythm games (musical), movement-based play (bodily-kinesthetic), collaborative games (interpersonal), and reflection on emotions (intrapersonal).

Therefore, preschool curricula should create a rich, supportive environment that encourages free play, experimentation, open-ended tasks, and social interaction. Teachers play a key mediating role by scaffolding children's creative efforts, offering meaningful feedback, and providing materials that invite exploration. Such an approach not only fosters creativity but also supports holistic cognitive, emotional, and social development in early childhood.

The development of creative abilities in preschool children requires the systematic integration of child-centered, play-based, and problem-oriented instructional methods. Contemporary research in early childhood pedagogy confirms that creativity does not emerge spontaneously but is fostered through carefully designed learning environments that provide opportunities for imagination, exploration, and social interaction. In this context, three interrelated methodological approaches are particularly effective: play-based learning, creative tasks, and problem-based situations.

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Play-Based Learning. Play is recognized as the leading activity in preschool age and serves as a natural medium for the development of creativity, self-regulation, and social competence. According to sociocultural theory, role-playing and сюжетно-ролевые игры allow children to model social roles, negotiate rules, and construct symbolic meanings within a shared cultural context. As emphasized in the works of Lev Vygotsky, imaginative play creates a developmental space in which children operate beyond their current level of competence, experimenting with new roles and perspectives. Empirical observations show that children who regularly participate in structured role-play demonstrate higher levels of narrative complexity, emotional expression, and collaborative problem-solving compared to peers engaged mainly in reproductive learning tasks. For example, during role-play scenarios such as "hospital," "shop," or "family," children not only reproduce social experiences but creatively transform them by inventing new сюжетlar, characters, and dialogue patterns. This process strengthens divergent thinking and symbolic representation, which are central components of creativity.
Creative Tasks. Creative tasks include artistic and expressive activities such as drawing, modeling with clay, construction with blocks, storytelling, music, and dramatization. These activities promote fine motor development, visual-spatial thinking, verbal fluency, and emotional expressiveness. Research on creativity assessment and development by Ellis Paul Torrance demonstrated that open-ended tasks significantly enhance fluency, flexibility, and originality in children's thinking. Unlike closed-ended задания, creative tasks allow multiple correct answers, thereby encouraging children to experiment with ideas without fear of failure. Comparative classroom observations indicate that children exposed to open-ended creative tasks produce a wider variety of original solutions, richer narratives, and more complex drawings than children working primarily with шаблон-based tasks (e.g., coloring within predefined outlines or reproducing a model). This suggests that the degree of openness in instructional activities directly influences the level of creative expression.
Problem-Based Situations. Problem-based situations involve presenting children with simple, developmentally appropriate challenges (e.g., "How can we help the character cross the river?" or "What can we build to protect the toy from the rain?"). Such tasks stimulate inquiry, hypothesis formation, and collaborative reasoning. In early childhood contexts, problem-based learning promotes not only

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cognitive engagement but also social interaction, as children negotiate ideas and test alternative solutions together. Comparative analysis of instructional practices shows that problem-based tasks lead to higher levels of sustained attention, cooperative dialogue, and flexible thinking than teacher-centered explanatory methods. Children become active participants in the learning process, constructing knowledge through exploration rather than passively receiving information. This aligns with constructivist principles articulated in the works of Jean Piaget, who emphasized active knowledge construction through interaction with the environment.

A small-scale pedagogical experiment was conceptually grounded in contemporary theories of child development and creativity, which emphasize the active, socially mediated nature of learning in early childhood. From a theoretical perspective, the division of children into groups exposed to creative versus traditional instructional methods reflects two contrasting pedagogical paradigms: child-centered constructivist approaches and teacher-centered reproductive models of learning. The application of creative methods (role-play, open-ended creative tasks, and problem-based situations) is theoretically justified by sociocultural and constructivist views of development. Within the framework proposed by Lev Vygotsky, children's creativity is understood to develop through internalization of socially mediated experiences. Role-play and imaginative activities function as leading forms of activity in preschool age, providing a symbolic space in which children can transform real-life experiences into new meanings. In this sense, creative instructional methods create optimal conditions for the development of initiative, independence, and imaginative thinking, as children are encouraged to act beyond the limits of direct instruction and to explore alternative perspectives.

From the standpoint of cognitive development theory, the use of open-ended tasks and problem situations aligns with the ideas of Jean Piaget, who viewed the child as an active constructor of knowledge. Problem-based situations stimulate processes of assimilation and accommodation, as children are required to adapt existing cognitive schemes to novel conditions. Theoretically, such activities support the development of cognitive flexibility and divergent thinking, since children are not limited to a single correct solution but are encouraged to generate and compare multiple possible strategies. Traditional teacher-centered

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instruction, in contrast, is more closely associated with reproductive forms of learning, which prioritize imitation and memorization and, therefore, provide fewer opportunities for creative cognitive restructuring. The theoretical interpretation of higher levels of imaginative play and verbal creativity observed in children exposed to creative instructional environments can also be explained through the multiple intelligences framework developed by Howard Gardner. This theory conceptualizes creativity as a multidimensional phenomenon that manifests across linguistic, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal domains. Instructional practices that incorporate storytelling, dramatization, movement, construction, and collaborative problem-solving theoretically activate multiple cognitive modalities simultaneously, thereby creating richer conditions for creative expression than approaches focused primarily on verbal instruction and reproduction of ready-made knowledge. Furthermore, child-centered pedagogical approaches are theoretically linked to higher levels of intrinsic motivation and engagement. When children are provided with autonomy, meaningful choices, and opportunities for self-expression, they are more likely to demonstrate initiative and sustained involvement in learning activities. In contrast, traditional instructional models that emphasize teacher control and correct reproduction of content may limit children's sense of agency, thereby constraining the development of creative initiative and exploratory behavior. In summary, the theoretical synthesis of sociocultural, constructivist, and multiple intelligences perspectives provides a coherent explanation for why instructional environments oriented toward play-based learning, open-ended creative tasks, and problem-based situations are more conducive to the development of creativity in preschool children. These approaches create psychologically and pedagogically favorable conditions for the emergence of imagination, cognitive flexibility, verbal creativity, and independent initiative, which together form the foundation of creative potential in early childhood.

The study confirms that organizing instructional activities on the basis of creative, play-based, and problem-oriented approaches significantly contributes to the development of preschool children's creative abilities. Preschool educators are recommended to design learning environments that encourage free expression, experimentation, and уважительное отношение к детским идеям. Systematic

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support of children's creativity in early years forms a foundation for future innovative thinking and learning motivation.

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