



DEVELOPING YOUNG LEARNERS' LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH: STRATEGIES AND PEDAGOGICAL TASKS

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ABSTRACT

Developing linguistic competence in young learners is a key goal in early English language education. This article explores practical strategies and tasks for improving children's phonological, lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic skills. The study highlights methods suitable for young learners, including games, songs, storytelling, and interactive activities. Tables summarize core tasks for each language area. Findings suggest that playful, context-rich, and communicative approaches enhance language learning for children

Introduction

English is a global language, and learning it from an early age helps children communicate effectively in school and daily life. Linguistic competence—understanding sounds, words, grammar, and how to use language correctly—is the foundation for speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills.

Teaching young learners is different from teaching older students: lessons must be fun, interactive, and connected to their experiences. This article focuses on tasks and strategies to help young learners develop all aspects of linguistic competence in an engaging way.

Components of Linguistic Competence for Young Learners

Linguistic competence includes several key areas, adapted for young learners:

- **Phonological competence:** recognizing sounds, rhymes, stress, and rhythm;
- **Lexical competence:** learning words, simple phrases, and everyday expressions;
- **Grammatical competence:** using basic sentence structures and word forms;
- **Pragmatic competence:** using language politely and appropriately in social situations.

Pedagogical Tasks for Developing Young Learners' Linguistic Competence

Phonological Skills

Table 1

Children need to hear and produce sounds correctly. Fun and engaging tasks are essential:

Nº	Task	Purpose	Method/Tool
1.	Singing songs and rhymes	Learn rhythm and stress	Nursery rhymes, action songs
2.	Minimal pair games	Distinguish similar sounds	Flashcards, listening games

3.	Chanting	Practice intonation	Class chants, repetitive phrases
4.	Story reading with sound emphasis	Hear natural pronunciation	Picture books, audio stories

1. Vocabulary Development

Table 2

Young learners acquire words best through context and play:

No	Task	Purpose	Method/Tool
1.	Picture-word matching	Associate words with images	Flashcards, picture books
2.	Role-play	Use words in context	Pretend play, classroom scenarios
3.	Word games	Practice and remember vocabulary	Bingo, memory cards
4.	Storytelling	Hear and use new words	Short stories, puppet shows

2. Grammar Practice

Table 3

Grammar should be taught through activities rather than rules:

No	Task	Purpose	Method/Tool
1.	Sentence building games	Form basic sentences	Word cards, sentence strips
2.	Action commands	Use verbs correctly	"Simon Says", classroom instructions
3.	Story completion	Apply grammar in context	Fill-in-the-blank stories
4.	Question and answer games	Practice word order	Q&A activities, pair work

3. Pragmatic Competence

Table 4

Children learn polite and appropriate language through interaction:

No	Task	Purpose	Method/Tool
1.	Greetings and farewells	Social communication	Role-play, puppet dialogues
2.	Thanking and requesting	Polite expressions	Classroom routines, dialogues
3.	Problem-solving in pairs	Cooperative communication	Simple tasks, games
4.	Sharing and turn-taking	Social interaction	Group activities, board games

Effective Approaches for Young Learners

1.Play-based learning: Games, songs, and movement activities motivate children.

2.Storytelling: Stories help children hear and use language naturally.

3.Task-based activities: Short tasks like finding objects or role-playing integrate vocabulary and grammar.

4.Technology tools: Interactive apps and songs support independent practice and fun learning.

Discussion

Young learners acquire language best when lessons are **fun, meaningful, and interactive**, as these qualities align with how children naturally explore and understand the world around them. When learning activities capture a child's interest, stimulate curiosity, and involve movement or creative engagement, the cognitive load associated with language learning becomes lighter and more enjoyable. As a result, children exhibit higher levels of motivation, sustained attention, and willingness to participate in classroom tasks.

Integrating **phonology, vocabulary, grammar, and pragmatics** into playful activities helps children internalize language in a holistic and natural way. For instance, phonological skills can be reinforced through songs, chants, and rhymes, which allow children to perceive sound patterns and rhythm. Vocabulary growth is supported through picture-based games, storytelling, and role-play, where children encounter new words in meaningful contexts. Grammar becomes accessible when embedded in interactive tasks—such as “Simon Says,” story sequencing, or sentence-building games—rather than through explicit rule explanation. Pragmatic competence develops during cooperative play, dialogues with peers, and classroom routines that teach politeness, turn-taking, and social communication.

Moreover, **repetition, context, and positive feedback** are essential for reinforcing language learning in young children. Repetition helps consolidate memory and allows learners to gain familiarity with structures and vocabulary without feeling pressured. Contextualized input ensures that language is not learned in isolation but linked to real-life situations, images, actions, and emotions that children can easily understand. Positive feedback—such as praise, encouragement, or corrective reformulation delivered gently—boosts learners' confidence, reduces anxiety, and fosters a willingness to experiment with language.

When these elements are combined, children not only memorize linguistic forms but also develop the ability to use them **meaningfully and spontaneously**. This naturalistic learning process mirrors first language acquisition, where play, interaction, and emotional support form the foundation for communication development. Ultimately, incorporating playful, engaging, and socially rich activities into lessons supports deeper linguistic competence, enhances motivation, and nurtures children's long-term interest in learning English.

Conclusion

Developing linguistic competence in young learners requires **age-appropriate, playful, and communicative strategies** that align with children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. At early stages, children learn most effectively when language is embedded in enjoyable and meaningful activities rather than formal instruction. Therefore, the teaching process should incorporate methods that stimulate children's natural curiosity, imagination, and desire for interaction. Play-based learning reduces anxiety and encourages children to

experiment with new words and structures without the fear of making mistakes, which is essential for building long-term linguistic confidence.

Teachers should combine **songs, games, stories, and interactive tasks** to help children build all areas of linguistic competence, including phonological, lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic skills. Songs and rhymes support phonological awareness by reinforcing rhythm, stress patterns, and sound discrimination. Games that require movement, problem-solving, or competition enhance vocabulary retention and grammar use in a natural, meaningful context. Stories and storytelling activities expose children to rich, repetitive language structures while also developing comprehension skills and imagination. Interactive tasks—such as pair work, group projects, role-plays, and simple classroom dialogues—promote pragmatic competence by teaching children how to use language politely, cooperatively, and appropriately in social situations.

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