



## EFFECTIVE AND PLAY-BASED METHODS FOR TEACHING THE ENGLISH ALPHABET TO PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

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### **Abstract**

Teaching the English alphabet to preschool children requires developmentally appropriate methods that combine systematic instruction with engaging learning activities. This paper examines the use of songs, visual aids, educational games, movement, and letter–sound activities to develop children's alphabet knowledge. Practical classroom examples illustrate how familiar objects and interactive tasks can connect English letters with meaningful experiences. Previous research on alphabet instruction and early literacy provides an evidence-based foundation for evaluating these approaches. The paper argues that effective alphabet teaching should combine explicit instruction, repetition, active participation, and age-appropriate play. It also proposes a simple assessment procedure for monitoring children's progress in recognizing and naming letters and identifying their corresponding sounds.

**Keywords:** preschool education, English alphabet, play-based learning, alphabet recognition, letter–sound correspondence, early literacy, interactive teaching, multisensory learning.

### **Аннотация**

Обучение английскому алфавиту детей дошкольного возраста требует применения методов, соответствующих их возрастным особенностям и сочетающих систематическое обучение с увлекательными видами деятельности. В статье рассматривается использование песен, наглядных материалов, дидактических игр, двигательной активности и упражнений на установление связи между буквами и звуками для формирования знаний



об английском алфавите. Практические примеры демонстрируют, как знакомые предметы и интерактивные задания помогают связывать английские буквы с понятными детям жизненными ситуациями. Научные исследования в области обучения алфавиту и формирования начальной грамотности служат доказательной основой для оценки рассматриваемых подходов. Обосновывается необходимость сочетания целенаправленного обучения, повторения, активного участия детей и игровых методов, соответствующих дошкольному возрасту. Также предлагается простая процедура оценки прогресса детей в распознавании и назывании букв, а также определении соответствующих им звуков.

**Ключевые слова:** дошкольное образование, английский алфавит, игровое обучение, распознавание букв, связь букв и звуков, начальная грамотность, интерактивные методы обучения, мультисенсорное обучение.

### 1. Introduction

Early childhood is an important period for developing language awareness and foundational literacy skills. Introducing the English alphabet during preschool education helps children become familiar with letter shapes, names, and sounds. However, teaching young learners exclusively through memorization and repetitive worksheets may not sufficiently engage their interests or accommodate their developmental needs.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) emphasizes the importance of developmentally appropriate learning experiences that incorporate play, active participation, and intentional teaching. Research also identifies alphabet knowledge as an important component of early literacy development [1; 2]. Therefore, preschool teachers should combine explicit instruction with practical, enjoyable, and meaningful activities.



The aim of this paper is to identify practical methods for teaching the English alphabet to preschool children and explain their educational value with reference to existing research and illustrative classroom examples.

## **2. Songs and Repetition**

Songs and rhymes can help children become familiar with the sequence and names of English letters. Rhythm, melody, gestures, and repetition create opportunities for active participation and repeated exposure to alphabetic symbols.

For example, a teacher can begin a lesson by singing the ABC song while pointing to letters on an alphabet chart. Children can clap along and point to the corresponding letters. The teacher can then display three letter cards—A, B, and C—and ask children to identify each letter individually.

This activity provides repeated exposure to letters while maintaining children's interest. However, singing the alphabet should be followed by activities that assess whether children can recognize individual letters independently. Knowing the alphabetical sequence does not necessarily mean that a child can identify letters when they are presented in a different order.

## **3. Connecting Letters with Familiar Objects**

Visual materials are particularly useful when abstract symbols are connected with concrete objects and familiar vocabulary. Teachers can introduce the letters A, B, and C through simple examples:

A — apple: Children look at an apple or its picture, repeat the word, and identify the letter A.

B — ball: Children observe a ball, say the word “ball,” and find the letter B on a card.





C — cat: Children look at a picture of a cat, repeat the word, and identify the letter C.

During a classroom activity, the teacher can place an apple, a ball, and a picture of a cat on a table. Children select letter cards and match them with the corresponding objects. The teacher can then ask, “Which letter does ball begin with?”

This exercise connects visual recognition, vocabulary development, and awareness of initial sounds. Teachers should explain that English letter names and speech sounds are not always identical. For example, the letter B is named /bi:/, whereas the initial sound in ball is /b/.

#### **4. Learning Through Educational Games**

Educational games allow children to practise identifying letters in a social and engaging environment. Play-based activities can provide meaningful opportunities for repetition while supporting listening, cooperation, and active participation [3].

One practical activity is the “Find the Letter” game. The teacher places several letter cards around the classroom and says, “Find the letter A.” Children search for the correct card and bring it to the teacher. The activity can be repeated with other letters as the children become more confident.

Another activity is “Match the Letters,” in which children match uppercase letters with their lowercase forms, such as A–a, B–b, and C–c. This helps them understand that different written forms can represent the same letter.

These activities provide opportunities to observe children’s progress. Teachers can note which letters children recognize independently and which require additional practice. To ensure that all children participate, activities should be adapted to different ability levels and conducted in a supportive, non-competitive atmosphere.





## **5. Multisensory Activities and Movement**

Multisensory activities combine visual, auditory, and tactile experiences. For example, children can look at a letter card, say the letter name, listen to its commonly taught sound, and trace its shape with a finger in a tray of sand.

A teacher might introduce the letter S by showing the card, modelling the sound /s/, and asking children to trace the letter while repeating a familiar word such as sun. Children can then search for another picture or object beginning with the same sound.

Such tasks offer different opportunities to practise letter recognition and sound association. Nevertheless, multisensory activities should be considered one possible instructional approach rather than automatically assumed to be more effective than all alternatives. Research involving preschool children found that explicit and systematic alphabet instruction supported learning, but multisensory instruction did not demonstrate a clear advantage over visual–auditory instruction [4].

Consequently, teachers should select activities according to children's needs, instructional objectives, available resources, and observed learning outcomes.

## **6. A Practical Example of a Short Lesson**

A 15-minute lesson for children aged approximately four to six can be organized as follows:

Warm-up (2 minutes): Sing the ABC song and review previously learned letters.

Letter introduction (3 minutes): Introduce two or three letters using cards and familiar objects.





Guided practice (4 minutes): Match letters with pictures and practise the corresponding words and sounds.

Educational game (4 minutes): Play “Find the Letter” or “Match the Letters.”

Assessment (2 minutes): Show individual letter cards and ask children to identify them without relying on other children’s answers.

The teacher records which letters each child recognizes correctly and which require further practice. The next lesson begins with a brief review before new letters are introduced.

The duration and number of target letters should be adjusted according to children’s attention spans, prior knowledge, and individual learning needs. The proposed lesson is a practical example, not a universally validated instructional sequence.

### **7. Assessing the Effectiveness of Alphabet Teaching**

The effectiveness of alphabet teaching should be evaluated through observable learning outcomes rather than inferred from children’s enjoyment alone. Piasta and Wagner’s meta-analysis examined 63 studies of alphabet instruction and found that instructional effects varied according to the type of alphabet knowledge measured and the content of instruction [1]. This finding highlights the importance of systematic teaching and appropriate assessment.

A preschool teacher can use a simple pre-assessment and post-assessment procedure. Before a teaching sequence, each child is shown a selected set of letters and asked to name them. After several lessons,

the same letters are presented in a different order. The teacher compares the number of correctly identified letters before and after instruction.





For example, if a child correctly identifies three out of six target letters before the lessons and five out of six afterward, the observed score increases by two letters. This result indicates progress for that child; however, it does not, by itself, establish that the teaching method caused the improvement.

For a more reliable evaluation, teachers should record results for all participating children, use consistent assessment procedures, and consider prior knowledge, attendance, and opportunities for practice. Where feasible, additional measures can assess uppercase and lowercase letter recognition, letter naming, and letter–sound correspondence separately. A comparison group or a more rigorous research design would provide stronger evidence about the effectiveness of a particular teaching approach.

## **8. Conclusion**

Teaching the English alphabet to preschool children should combine systematic, age-appropriate instruction with engaging activities such as songs, visual materials, educational games, movement, and meaningful letter–sound exercises. Research indicates that alphabet instruction contributes to the development of early literacy skills, although its effects depend on the instructional content and implementation

Practical classroom activities can provide opportunities for active participation and help teachers monitor children’s progress. However, enjoyable activities should be accompanied by explicit instruction, regular revision, and appropriate assessment. Multisensory techniques may be useful for providing varied learning experiences, but their effectiveness should be evaluated in relation to specific learning objectives.

Overall, combining purposeful instruction with age-appropriate play offers a practical foundation for developing alphabet knowledge and preparing preschool children for further English language learning.





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