

FaR 2021

International Forum “Freedom and responsibility in pivotal times”

**SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUNG LEARNERS  
IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASS**

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**Abstract**

The article views the problem of young learners' socio-emotional development which is considered as a process of formation and improvement of socially valuable personality traits: ability to social interaction, benevolence towards all people and representatives of other countries, ability to empathize, willingness to help, etc. As proved by psychological science, the direction of personality development is largely determined by the emotional experiences of a person. Since language is the main factor in human socialization, the authors suggest that learning a foreign language from an early age can contribute to the social and emotional development of young learners. The article lists conditions under which such a development is possible. These conditions include an effective educational environment, personality-oriented teacher's behavior; emotional states of teacher and students and emotional colouring of teacher's speech are referred to these conditions. The authors also argue that teachers can socially and emotionally develop pre-schoolers and young students in a variety of ways, such as by using emotionally intensive activities, building trust, respecting and caring for each child, and consistently teaching social and emotional skills using children's stories, socially sensitive problem situations and stories that give effective praise, stimulate social interaction between students. As a result, the study concludes that if teachers prioritize developing the social and emotional skills of young learners in foreign language lessons classes, they will be rewarded with happy, motivated and socially active children.

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*Keywords:* Young learners, teaching a foreign language, socio-emotional development



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## **1. Introduction**

According to the Federal State Educational Standard (2013) of the Russian Federation the country's educational community should aim at comprehensive development of students by means of each of the academic disciplines mastered at school. At early stages of education children's personal development involves emotional and creative qualities; interest and positive attitude towards speaking a foreign language, feeling of awareness of oneself as a person belonging to a certain cultural society; development of higher cognitive functions and language abilities.

Psychologists (Bozhovich & Slavina, 1968; Vygotsky, 1982–1984) assert that the direction of personality development is largely determined by the person's emotional experiences. So, language education in recent years is rightly associated not only with the appropriation of knowledge, skills and abilities, “but also with changes in the motivational and emotional spheres of young learners, which accompany the acquisition of creative and wide social experiences” (Ariyan, 2017, p. 138).

## **2. Problem Statement**

Since the language is proved to be the main factor in the socialization of the individual, turning to a foreign language as an academic discipline and its role in social and emotional development of young learners seems to be justified. As proved by psychological and pedagogical science children who are socially and emotionally healthy are usually in positive mood, follow the teacher's directions readily, have close relationships with the teacher and other learners, show interest in others. They recognize and manage their own emotions, understand other's emotions and show empathy, gain access to ongoing play and group activities, enjoy playing and are able to compromise with others (Ho & Funk, 2018). Meanwhile children with social and emotional difficulties demonstrate trouble participating in learning activities, communicating with peers, following the teacher's directions and rules (Hyson, 2004). Since the language (the native one in the first place, but also to a large extent the foreign language being studied) is the main factor in the socialization of the individual, the role of a foreign language as an academic discipline in social and emotional development of young learners seems to be urgent.

## **3. Research Questions**

Leontiev (1971) emphasized that any human activity is based on emotional experiences. Each specific speech situation is comprehended and evaluated with the direct participation of emotions. The scholar attributed intellectual, aesthetic and social processes to be the ones that characterize the main content of a person's emotional life and constitute his emotional experience. The latter is also formed in the process of communicating with other people.

### **3.1. Formation of an effective educational environment**

The formation of an effective educational environment is directly related to the teacher's implementation of a democratic style of communication characterized by the positive emotional saturation of the educational process and the absence of negative attitudes.

### **3.2. Ways of social and emotional development**

Another important research issue concerns the use of various types of creative activity and means of spiritual products created by people – works of musical art, poetry, elements of artistic creativity which also have an emotionally developing value.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The objective is to investigate the conditions for social and emotional development of young learners in the process of a foreign language acquisition. Besides, we will consider the ways of pre-schoolers` and younger students` social and emotional development in foreign language classes.

## **5. Research Methods**

A comprehensive analysis of the ways of social and emotional development of young learners by means of a foreign language was carried out on the basis of studying, comparing and identifying the main theoretical and practical provisions that underlie the substantiation of the problem. The problematic field of research was the identification of conditions of emotional and social development of young learners.

## **6. Findings**

Socio-emotional development means “the process of formation and improvement of socially valuable personality traits, during which learners master various ways of emotional response to a wide range of objects and subjects, the ability to be aware of their own emotions and manage them in various life situations, to establish and maintain emotional contact with other people” (Ariyan, 2017, p. 143). All this is vitally important to begin to form in children from an early age.

Research shows that positive emotions provide a person with a certain pre-launch state and the necessary emotional tone. Emotions manifest themselves in all types of human activity, acting as internal motives, and significantly affect its very course. The result of the activity is also experienced emotionally (Kostelnik et al., 2015).

The communicative function of emotions provides the ability to better understand other people and build relationships on this basis. It also allows one, without using speech, to inform others about their emotional states and attitude to the reality.

Emotions facilitate the process of expanding the world view, the orientation of the person in various situations, anticipating their awareness by predicting the possible outcome of the events (Vitt, 1980). The influence of emotions on the memory processes and the development of imagination, which is considered to be psychological basis for creative activity, is also well known.

### **6.1. Conditions for social and emotional development of young learners**

Teachers can promote learner's social and emotional development in many ways, for example, by building trusting relationships, respecting and caring about every child, teaching social and emotional skills consistently, giving effective praise, stimulating social interactions between learners.

In solving the problem, the great importance is attached to the formation of an effective educational environment where the first place is occupied by the teacher's behaviour, which should be emotionally rich and personality-oriented.

The emotional colouring of the teacher's speech is usually achieved due to the special speech intonation, thoroughly selected lexical means, as well as the general emotional modality of the content of the statements. Speech intonation conveys various states of the speaker: apathy or agitation, sadness or joy, self-doubt or confidence. Formulating this or that communicative task, the teacher "translates" certain emotions. The teacher's speech should be dominated by encouraging comments. It is important from the very beginning to teach children to understand these motivating phrases.

Effective social and emotional development of students is largely determined by the consonance of the emotional states of the teacher and students. It results in establishment of trusting relationships in the team, high educational motivation, ability to rejoice at each other's successes.

It should be noted that complete "emotional calm" in a foreign language lesson is also dangerous, as is the creation of a situation of "proper emotional tension" (Leontiev, 1971), which (as opposed to operational tension) arises in a young learner against the background of affective traces from past failures, depletes him and disorganizes his activity. Therefore, psychological science focuses on the socio-psychological optimization of the educational process in foreign languages.

To develop and learn effectively, young children need the context of trusting and caring relationships with their teachers. In this context learners enjoy asking questions, solving problems, expressing their feelings and thinking. They learn to use words to express their emotions and benefit socially, emotionally and academically when teachers intentionally create close, trusting relationships (Raikes & Edwards, 2009).

Definitely, gaining the trust of every child is not that simple. To create trusting relationships teachers should consistently offer them warmth, affection, caring and respect even on bad days when children are misbehaving (Gordon & Browne, 2014). Even on such difficult days learners' social and emotional well-being is nourished by the teacher's warmth and affection. S/he uses appropriate tone of voice at all times; his/her speech is at normal pitch and volume; the tone is relaxed and soft. Even when the teacher has to reject a child's behaviour s/he remains calm and warm to convey that her concern is with the behaviour – not the child (Ho & Funk, 2018).

A key way to connect with children is showing respect, establish close personal bonds with every child. Based on this assumption, the teacher listens with full attention and re-states what the children say. In this way the teacher conveys that s/he cares about what the children have to say. As a result the learners are more likely to share their thoughts, ideas and feelings they feel heard and accepted (Duffy, 2008).

Teachers should help learners to realize what they are doing, understand how their actions affect others and choose positive alternatives. They can do it by observing and providing immediate positive feedback on their desirable behaviour (Riley et al., 2008).

Meaningful feedback is a powerful strategy for fostering learners' social and emotional development. To make praise still more effective, teachers describe specifically what they see and like. Overall, children's social and emotional health affects their development and learning; they show greater motivation to learn, have a more positive attitude toward school, demonstrate higher academic performance (Hyson, 2004; Kostelnik et al., 2015).

## 6.2. Ways of social and emotional development of young learners

The age specificity of young students, as well as the conditions for learning a foreign language outside the linguistic environment, determines the educational material and techniques. This can be done by using emotionally rich activities, children's fairy tales, socially acute problem situations and stories, paintings, works of musical art, poetry, etc.

It has been proven that emotionally intense activities are much more effective than emotionally unsaturated ones. So, it is of great importance for the optimal organization of the educational process to include young learners in activities that develop their emotional sphere. The techniques used should in most cases be in the nature of interactive communication exercises.

For example, learners can be offered the following speech tasks (if necessary, their native language can be used).

- There is a new student in your class. What will you tell him so that he understands that he can be friends with you?
- Your classmate left a pen and a notebook at home. He is upset, because there will be a test. Tell him not to worry – you will be happy to help.
- Your friend is suspected of doing something bad. But you are sure, that he couldn't do it. Convince his parents and the teacher of this.

As stated above, personality development does not occur in any activity, but only in the one that is saturated with elements of creativity and causes a person's interest and emotional upsurge. This type of activity includes primarily play, which is considered as one of the most important techniques for the development of a child's personality.

Using a play in foreign languages classes at the early stages of learning allows not only to successfully form elementary communicative competence, but also abilities, attitudes, volitional, emotional and social qualities, that is, to create conditions for the development of the personality as a whole. Play is a way of organizing a social space in which students master the skills to build verbal and non-verbal behaviour in accordance with the norms of human interaction and the social characteristics of the addressee. The importance of play as a socializing factor at the early stage of learning is explained by the fact that it is social in nature.

The game teaches to solve the problems of interpersonal relations, compatibility, partnership, friendship, camaraderie, allows children to master the socio-cultural experience of adults. All these and many other characteristics and qualities of play make it the most important mechanism for the social development.

At the early stage of learning, play with a doll, which is one of the varieties of role play, is of particular social developmental importance. Accepting the role of a character portrayed by a doll, or any other character (from Russian or Anglo-American fairy tales, cartoons, videos, stories for children), students are involved in role play, which creates favourable conditions for the formation of social competence.

Dolls, toys, toy animals can be successfully used to create problem situations and act out problem stories in foreign language classes. For the organization of developmental education, a socially acute problem situation is of particular importance. It is a situation that generates a mental state of intellectual

and emotional difficulty, in which the solution of the problem requires the student to designate his own social and moral position.

A student analyzes his own verbal and non-verbal behaviour: whether the means of communication used are appropriate, whether his behaviour is adequate in sociocultural terms, etc. No matter how complicated it sounds for young learners, research shows that even preschool learners should be taught fundamentals of socially appropriate behaviour (Ariyan, 2017).

Problem stories can also be used as an effective means of young learners' social and emotional development since they tell about a character who finds himself in a difficult or funny situation and the participation of children is necessary to get out of it (solve the problem). The significance of such stories is associated, first of all, with the fact that from early childhood a person's interest is directed primarily to other people. It has been proven in psychology that thinking also develops first of all on social objects – people and their actions (Lisina, 2009; Sheffer, 2003). Participation in the action of such stories makes children feel strong, smart and knowledgeable. When a character does not understand something or makes mistakes, they seek to help him. These kinds of stories make children empathize, reflect and express their thoughts and attitudes that undoubtedly contribute to the development of their emotional and intellectual sphere (Onishchik, 2013).

Among the methods of socially developing teaching of foreign languages at an early stage, a special place belongs to work with fairy tales, which is able to bring into action the mechanism of personality development at all three levels – informational, operational and value-oriented. A fairy tale is considered as a universal phenomenon of spiritual culture, containing great potentialities for the development of a child's personality, including him in the world of culture.

In the course of learning a foreign language, a fairy tale allows learners to experience a sense of joy from cooperation, "appropriate" new social experience, and develop their own creative potential. It forms in children such socially valuable properties and personality traits as a sense of trust, unity, a sense of satisfaction from cooperation with a teacher and classmates, teaches them to empathize, to believe in the value of human life, freedom, peace, in the power of good.

Being a "primary mechanism of socialization" (Filippov & Koltsova, 2003, p. 168), a fairy tale not only conveys to learners images in which feelings and emotions are expressed, but also provides them with a variety of information, including of a social nature. At the same time, fairy tales can be built on international, universal content and introduce children to the integral culture of society, to the extremely common values of culture, cultural universals.

Revealing the true moral meaning of the fairy tale in cooperation with the learners and creating conditions for their assimilation of the most important moral concepts and norms in the context of the dialogue of cultures is the main task of the teacher. Interpretation of the meanings of life, reflected in the fairy tale, provides "intellectualization of emotions", develops social, racial, ethnic tolerance.

Reading and discussing fairy tales is an excellent way to invite learners to identify the character's emotions, and relate the character's experiences to their own. To introduce a new social and emotional skill a teacher carefully chooses high quality books to read.

Working with foreign language fairy tales will have a socially developmental value, provided that they are selected in accordance with the following criteria, which include developmental, psychological, linguistic and cultural aspects.

- Potential suitability of a fairy tale plot for the personal development of students: the priority of social, racial, ethnic tolerance, the formation of moral ideas and moral norms, the presence of samples of socially correct behavior of people.
- Compositional and plot construction of a fairy tale, a dynamic presentation of events and a vivid ending, which ensures the internal psychological activity of learners and makes them mentally take part in the actions of the heroes and empathize with them.
- Reflection of usual behavioral situations, characteristic of another culture, socio-cultural specifics of the country.
- The accessibility of the tale, which is ensured by the richness of the tale with verbs of movement, nouns with a subject meaning, the presence of lexical and syntactic repetitions in the text, the correspondence of syntactic structures to those that prevail in children's speech in the native language.

Communication with fairy-tale characters replaces communication with real native speakers at an early stage forms such a personality quality as dialogicity.

Some fairy tales can be related to children's recent social and emotional behaviours in the classroom. To connect the characters and the situations in the fairy tale with the learners' experiences the teacher can read it several times. During the second reading she can ask meaningful questions: "What do you think the characters are feeling? What would you do differently if this happens in our classroom? How would you solve the problem?" (Roberts, & Crawford, 2008). Then the teacher can have the children to act the tale out in order to feel the taste of kindness, courage and generosity. The follow-up activities aimed at extending and applying what children have learned from reading fairy-tales are crafts, games, songs and plays.

It is also necessary to mention the elements of artistic creativity that are traditionally used in foreign language classes for pre-schoolers and young students due to the peculiarities of this age. This contributes to the development of artistic and creative abilities of children, such as the ability to perceive and experience beauty in life and the ability to see beauty in works of art, to experience an emotional response to beauty; the ability to engage in creative activity, relying on generally accepted canons of beauty; etc. (Vetlugina, 2012). Taking into account the exceptional importance of creative activity in the speech and personal development of children, we will also dwell on the use of authentic works of art, poetry, songs, etc. in the educational process that also have an emotional and developmental value.

It is well known that music is the strongest mental stimulus that penetrates into the depths of consciousness. Music affects the emotional state of the child and plays an important role in creating emotional empathy that accompanies the perception of a piece of music or song, thereby developing the child's imagination and its aesthetic properties and qualities. The use of musical, song and poetic material is based on performing activity which is associated with the understanding and creative interpretation of the artistic image contained in it.

The use of musical, song and poetic material is based on performing activities associated with the understanding and creative interpretation of the artistic image contained in it. According to Vetlugina

(2012), such educational material presupposes the manifestation of the creative activity of children, associated with the reaction to direct impressions of the sense organs, characteristic of young learners, as well as sensitivity to figurative and emotional moments.

Singing songs in a foreign language is one of the favourite musical activities of younger students which not only creates a positive emotional mood, but also contributes to the memorization and consolidation of language material. Moreover, songs and poems of the country of the target language provide children with the opportunity to get acquainted with the elements of a foreign culture, its difference from their native culture and so to socially develop.

The peculiarities of the rhythmic organization of song and poetic texts in a foreign language contribute to the personal development of the child also because they help to synchronize and stabilize neuropsychological processes in the body (Onishchik, 2013). Accordingly, various poetic forms (counting rhymes, teasers, lullabies, riddles, sayings, etc.), easily remembered due to their rhythm and rhymes, can be used both for teaching a foreign language and for the development of the student's personality.

## 7. Conclusion

The research-based conclusion is as follows. A good foreign language program for young children should aim at developing social and emotional skills. If teachers give them priority, they will be rewarded with happy, friendly, motivated and socially active children who know how to express their emotions in productive ways, how to avoid and resolve conflicts, share and take turns, and thus demonstrating a high degree of social and emotional development.

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