

**THESIS**

**LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE UNDER THE AGE OF FIVE: VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT IN BILINGUAL FAMILY - ENGLISH – BULGARIAN**

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**I. CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION**

The foreign language acquisition of children could be a challenge in families. Making children who have not achieved their school age yet to acquire a foreign language of a parent at home supposes that the acquisition approaches should be completely tailored to the characteristics of the early childhood. Some of these characteristics include curiosity of the kids, their abilities to memorize better visual and audible information than written one, as most of them still can’t read and write and their desire to turn into a play for most of the events in their lives. These characteristics actually determine how the children in preschool age can acquire a foreign language by a parent and how to achieve good efficiency of the acquisition process.

The **topic** of the actual thesis is learning English as a second language before the age of five. The focus is on the development of English vocabulary skills of children under five in the ambiance of a bilingual family.

The **purpose** of the study is to reveal how the children from bilingual couples can learn English vocabulary through methods and tactics that can achieve maximal efficiency for their age and that are completely synchronized with the specific characteristics of early childhood.

The **object** of the research is to establish how two children at the age of 3 and 5, living in a bilingual Bulgarian-English family, learn English vocabulary at home. The child at the age of 3 is called Ilia and the child at the age of 5 is called Dany. The mother is from Minnesota, United States of America, and she is living in Bulgaria. The mother is married to a Bulgarian national, and is not fluent in the Bulgarian language. The children speak both English and Bulgarian.

The **context** of the bilingual situation is complicated as the two children aged 5 and 3 need to deepen their knowledge in English vocabulary in order to master the language of their American mother. At the same time, as the mother is still not fluent in Bulgarian and due to the fact that the children spend most of the time with her, it is important that children master the language of their mother in order to have a smooth communication at home. Apart from it, they should be also available to be mastered by a non-Bulgarian speaker, such as the American mother, so that she can apply them at home.

The **primary hypothesis** of the research is that English language acquisition for children in preschool age should be mostly based on the sensorial perceptions as they are not still so skilled in memorizing written or spoken information, also most of them still can’t read. Acquiring a foreign language should rely mostly on expressive techniques that make children connect visually or audibly perceived information with new vocabulary.

Within the given bilingual situation as a **research question** emerges how English language can be successfully acquired by children under the age of 5, mostly in home ambiance and through tactics that are accessible to practice even by a person without pedagogical education as is the situation in the case study.

The **tasks** that will be completed within the research are as follows: 1. Outlining particular challenges related to the English language acquisition of children in the age fewer than 5 years old.

2. Doing qualitative research on some easy to apply methods and tactics for children that let them learn vocabulary in English.

3. Making deductive conclusions on the effects from the methods outlined and how they let children learn vocabulary.

The **research methods** used are three main ones:

1. Qualitative research on the methods used in the English acquisition of Ilia and Dany.
2. Analysis on the results of the research;
3. Deductive conclusions from the research.

The **stakeholders** for the actual research are many. This is a very important question to discuss in the context of the fast spread of transnational marriages where one of the parents is Bulgarian and the other is an English speaker. It can be considered also as important in the shadow of the massive migrations of our times where refugees and migrant workers move abroad with families. It supposes that the children of all those people will need to master a foreign language, most often English. Given such facts, the tactics and approaches discussed in the thesis should be more general, easy to apply even in home ambiance and accessible to anyone who needs them. In general perspective, such a question has as stakeholder the whole linguistic academic and pedagogical community who works in the field of languages acquisition of children in preschool age.

The thesis has a **structure** in five chapters. The first chapter is the actual introduction that gives a general perspective on the topic, the object, the purpose, the research question and methods, the tasks of the research, and its stakeholder groups. The second chapter focuses on literary review of the authors’ contributions and the sources used to create the thesis. The third one reveals the methodology of the research. The fourth chapter shows the results from the research. The fifth reveals the conclusions and further recommendations for research. The thesis ends with a reference list.

**II. CHAPTER TWO. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Literature on the topic of linguistic acquisition for children is abundant. The authors emphasize the impact of expressiveness and communication within the acquisition process of children, especially those in preschool age. There is a lot written about pedagogical communication, the expressiveness of the acquisition process and its place in school.

Overall as three main principles around which most of authors cited unite and proclaim as most useful within the linguistic acquisition of children in preschool age emerge the following ones:

*1. Enforced communication between the tutor who is the native speaker parent and the kid as children like to communicate and must be encouraged to express themselves;*

*2. Expressiveness of the acquisition process that is gained through images, visual and audible resources and activities stimulating sensitiveness.*

*3. Comprehensibility of the acquisition process so that children can understand the information offered.*

Valuable practical rules on how to conduct the whole acquisitional process of children are found in the book "Pedeutology" by Dobrinka Todorina and Krassimira Marulevska, where the famous Croatian pedagogue Basarchik from the XIX century is quoted, but in fact their validity is very strong to this day:

“… 1. Teach naturally (make sure that the training is according to the students' mental development and perception) ... 2. Teach visually (); direct the students to form concepts from the acquired ideas and to derive rules from the individual examples; () 3. Teach comprehensively (with training stimulates the whole activity of the soul) ... (Basarchik, 1851) ”[[1]](#footnote-0)

This is how, one hundred and seventy years ago, the need to teach expressively, comprehensively and interactively was scientifically substantiated and derived by "stimulating all the activity of the soul." In fact, if a historical retrospective is made, even the schools in ancient Greece of sages such as Socrates and Aristotle were located in nature, where through philosophical interaction and empirical study of nature and the world around them, the Athenians acquired - under the watchful eye of their sage mentor and teacher - their necessary knowledge in the field of life, politics, trade, war. [[2]](#footnote-1)

In this sense, it would be very simplе to say that interactive acquisition is a product of modern society: the truth is that it has indeed gained great popularity today, but it has existed for at least several millennia. Even the works of ancient authors prove the need for the acquisition process to be multidimensional, diverse and to provide the widest possible range of knowledge, or at least to encourage students to curiosity to discover knowledge themselves.

In his book "Psychology of professional pedagogical communication" the author Stoycho Ivanov also emphasizes the importance of the process of pedagogical communication to be charming in order to be effective. In addition, the book implicitly provides valuable advice on how the practices of charming pedagogical communication can be used professionally by anyone in all areas of life, so as to better protect their interests and argue their views. [[3]](#footnote-2)

So the art of the good educator is actually self-multiplying. Very often in the acquisition practice it is possible for tutors not to realize how valuable this quality is: to convey the audience through their activities and the ability to speak argumentatively, to defend with facts and through diverse evidence their views. In this way, adolescents gain the self-confidence and professional self-confidence so valuable in life.

The book “Life alike pedagogical thinking: theoretical and empirical research” the author Lyubomir Popov clearly reveals how important it is to master the ability to look at life's challenges from a pedagogical point of view, as pedagogical situations are practically all around us, but few manage to respond to them in the optimal way, to benefit from the situation or to quench a looming conflict. [[4]](#footnote-3) Through interesting references to life situations on the street, at home, at work, the author offers a better approach to his readers on how to deal with challenges, looking at problems with pedagogical accuracy and wisdom, finding the reasons for them and mutually beneficial solutions.

This is why, through the interactive learning interactions, it is necessary for the pedagogue to train his students - to discover the problem, thinking in many directions, from cause to effect, as he himself explains the laws of nature, history, grammar or mathematics, making references to the most expressive examples from the world and life.

Expressiveness is the main quality that language acquisition interactions with children in pre-school must possess. When something is memorable, i.e. is instantly imprinted in the mind, the chance that the material is being well retained by the student increases.

This is one of the reasons why textbooks and books for kindergarten and preschool are richly illustrated, especially in elementary and middle school, as the visual representation of the material is usually more easily imprinted in the mind, because from a purely biological point of view, people perceive most of the outside world through their eyes. [[5]](#footnote-4) For disciplines such as history or fine arts that are taught to minors even in the adolescence age, although not only for them, the expression of knowledge through visual materials is particularly important, as there is virtually no other way for students to visualize personalities and events from centuries ago.

The sound is also memorable. Here the auditory perception intervenes, which takes second place after the visual in terms of the information that a person receives from the outside world. [[6]](#footnote-5) That is why listening exercises are so common in the learning process, especially when it comes to learning foreign languages.

The other sensory perceptions that make information about the world available to man as its recipient are smell, taste and touch. [[7]](#footnote-6)This connection is especially popular in acquisition subjects related to sciences such as chemistry, for example, where the properties of materials and substances such as odor, hardness, elasticity, etc., are practically difficult to explain without involving the sense of smell and touch next to them. Practically from a purely biological point of view, a person perceives and processes in his mind what he sees, hears, smells, tastes or touches. This is the basis on which his brain extracts the information it needs, analyzes it, synthesizes it and uses it in the future in the form of memory. [[8]](#footnote-7)

This theoretical retrospection with a hint of biological knowledge is not really accidental. It is a proof that the acquisition process should not be reduced to the explanation of the material to acquire to the students, regardless of which course of study they are in. On the contrary, it is necessary to adapt a variety of methods and strategies to improve the quality of acquisition, hence the volume of mastered and permanently imprinted in the memory of the students material through visual, auditory and sensory perception of information. It is especially important to apply strategies for expressive interaction when acquiring a foreign language, as in the case of English. The language is constantly changing, enriching, and respectively increasing the requirements for its proficiency.[[9]](#footnote-8)

In foreign language acquisition, it is important to accumulate as much vocabulary as possible, which will allow the student to express himself freely on various issues. At the same time, he must know the peculiarities of the phonetics of the respective language so that his speech sounds understandable to his local listeners. Finally, for the successful mastering of a foreign language it is necessary to know in detail the grammatical and syntactic rules to which this language is subject. Without them, the semantic connection of speech would be lost, regardless of the number of words the student speaks.

For the acquisition of syntax and grammar it is especially important to explain and find the causal connection, especially in languages ​​based on Latin, such as English, because Latin grammar – which is their basis – is radically different from that in Slavic. languages, such as Bulgarian, and it would be difficult to work with analogies. In English acquisition, it is important for tutors to be extremely innovative, to offer and use the latest good practices to make the learning process itself as beneficial as possible for children, especially those in preschool age.

So, within the context of the authors and books discussed, the main conclusions from this literature review theoretical chapter of the study are:

* The impact of interactive interactions in the overall acquisitional process and the need to apply them widely and in various combinations;
* The impact of the teacher as a figure who not only serves as a mediator between knowledge and students, i.e. the one who has to pass on the relevant knowledge to them, but also as a mediator of the experience they will gain to solve in the future the complex life and professional situations;
* The impact for the students to develop for themselves a certain pedagogical rationality and objectivity from a very early age. This pedagogical objectivity will help him to defend his views and find the optimal solutions to the problems, like a good teacher who guides his class in the right direction of behavior and learning.

The next chapter, using the knowledge base of the actual one of linguistic acquisition, will reveal the study’s methodology. It will be discussed how different acquisition methods proved within the overall English acquisition process of Ilia and Dani at home.

**III. CHAPTER THREE. METHODOLOGY**

The actual chapter offers a **methodological review** on the methods used to make the research and how they were applied exactly in the context of the situation given with the two children.

The research is of the type of **qualitative research**. The focus is on the application of English vocabulary acquisition methods at pre-school age and what are the results of them, how do they correlate with expectations.

It uses mainly **descriptive approach** to present the following information in the order outlined below:

1. Methods of the research,
2. Their application,
3. The results of the methods applied,
4. The trends that emerge within the results,
5. How to understand the trends and to use them in the acquisition practice.

The methods of the research and their application are discussed in the actual chapter, while the results in the next one and the trends and their interpretation – in the conclusions chapter.

The **population sample** for the qualitative research consists of two persons. They are, as stated before, two children:

* Ilia – 3 years old.
* Dany – 5 years old.

The participants and their mother are informed that their acquisitional progress through the different methods will be used as a basis for assessing the benefits of the methods. Their mother as legally responsible for the participants, due to their minority, has orally given her consent.

The **time period** when the various methods were applied consists of three months, June, July and August 2020 and the results and trends interpretation is based only on the period where the methods were applied.

The **acquisition techniques** discussed are four main and they are briefly outlined as a list below, followed by a short description of each one:

1. Cuisenaire Rods.

2. Montessori Letter Work

3. Visual stimuli for presenting words.

4. Play and learn methods.

The **choice** of techniques is not hazardous. It is intentionally done combining methods that are only suitable for children in preschool age and takes into account the level of their physical and psychological development. The methods aim to prove three main characteristics of the pre-school English language acquisition that often are discussed in pedagogical ambiance in contradictory context:

* To prove and argue to this part of the audience, which still has doubts about the benefits of combining different methods of acquisition, both traditional and innovative ones.
* To prove that interactive and multimedia innovations, but also plays in acquisition can fit together very well, as children like to have their attention retained through creativity and are more open to learning when feeling happy.
* To dispel one of the popular myths that interactive and multimedia innovations are expensive or difficult to access; on the contrary, it is worthwhile to use them both at home and at school and many of them are completely free.

The Cuisenaire rods are named after their creator Georges Cuisinaire, a Belgian teacher who introduced the rods in the second half of the twentieth century. They are used mainly to develop mathematical skills of children in preschool age through combining traditional mathematical operations with visually expressive tools: the colorful rods. [[10]](#footnote-9)

The rods are in different colors and they are used mainly for counting. Arranged together they help the children to develop their mathematical skills, but also their capacity to compare different objects as the rods are in different length and the children have to arrange them so that the smaller ones complete in length to a bigger one. Also the rods develop the symbolic expression of children and help them to associate characteristics like colors and length to numbers. Each rod actually represents a different number and that is how through combining different rods children develop their associative ability as well. [[11]](#footnote-10)

Ilia and Dany play with their mother at home with a kit of Cuisenaire rods overall twenty to thirty minutes, twice per week. This lets them improve their English vocabulary and to develop a specific thinking and calculating ability directly in English, which is actually very useful in mastering a language. This way it is easier for them to express themselves on the calculations done.

Montessori Letter work is also very useful for the children in mastering language. It is developed by the famous Italian pedagogue Maria Montessori and consists in building words through letters. This is very useful for children in preschool age as it helps them to learn reading through enjoying playing with alphabets. [[12]](#footnote-11)

Ilia and Dany play through the Montessori Letter Work in order to learn more new words that can help them to improve their vocabulary. They arrange each letter in an aim to make a word, spelled by their mother. This play takes the family overall thirty minutes twice a week and the children show a high overall satisfaction with it.

Visual stimuli for presenting words are very useful for learning vocabulary in preschool age. As visual stimuli can be used various kinds of staff: things that every household has at home such as clothes, furniture, equipment, etc. In the case of Ilia and Dany the mother often uses this tactic absolutely involuntarily as she speaks English as a native and during all the conversations with her kids she uses gestures to point out on the things she is talking about.

Showing visually the object of the conversation is a very good method to improve the vocabulary of children in preschool age as they will start to associate the different words they hear with the objects that they see. For bilingual children it is often the tactic when mastering the language from one of the parents: they are shown the objects their parents are talking about. [[13]](#footnote-12)

Still it is very important for the parents to keep in mind that they must fully use their body language and gestures to help their children learn vocabulary easily. In the case of Dany and Ilia, the American mother was not familiar in the beginning with this trick and she was impressed to see herself how fast her children memorize English vocabulary when she points out for them everything she is talking about.

Apart from visually showing the objects within the conversation, she started to show even some stuff she is talking about to her children on the net, especially when talking about something that is more complicated and can’t be found in the everyday ambiance. She admits to showing at least thirty times daily to her children different objects she is talking about either in life or on the net. The mother assesses this method as very easy and efficient in improving vocabulary within the three months of the research.

The last technique is briefly resumed as “play and learn”. It includes different methods that can be practiced with children in preschool age such as playing with toys and naming them, doing sport or playful exercises outside and naming the actions that children do, overall it is a large technique known amongst pedagogues like playing through learning.

Many bilingual kindergartens in Bulgaria, as well as in England and other Western countries practice it as well, combining both the pleasure from the game and the usefulness of learning for the children. This technique works well for bilingual children indeed.

In the case of Dany and Ilia, their mother now uses different playing methods to help them learn new and improve their existing vocabulary in English. She used some of them unintentionally, but as soon as she was made aware how enjoyable and successful learning they can be, she started to practice them intentionally in order to help her children become more confident English speakers.

One of the most favorite methods for the children is playing with an egg toy capsule and Dany and Ilia practice it twice a week with their mother. The delicious “Kinder Surprise” chocolate eggs serve as a real tool in advancing in English, as the kids have to open the capsule, name the toy within, spell letter by letter and finally write the name of the toy on a sheet of paper. If they just name and spell the name without errors, they are awarded with the toy. If they even write it without errors, they are both awarded with the chocolate and the toy.

In the beginning, it was most often Dany who was awarded both with the chocolate and the toy, but now Ilia advanced fast, motivated by the fact to get the two rewards. Now Ilia can even write some easy words in English, despite his young age of three. The mother finds the method very motivating as well.

The other method from the “play and learn” technique is role playing. Or they can even make home theater, kindergarten or nursery theater, etc, depending on the resources. The kids can practice it at home and at kindergarten, no matter the ambiance, but the idea is just to make them play roles in any favorite story. They can even take special clothes or make decorations; or just role play in a simple game with their parents or a tutor.

The role playing is very efficient in the case of Dany and Ilia. Their American mother used to invite them to play their favorite scenes of “Peter Pan” and they enjoyed it a lot. Now, as she is aware of the benefits of the method, she does it once weekly, usually on Saturdays.

The kids are role playing different scenes of “Peter Pan”, mostly the battle between Peter and Captain Hook, based on the chapters their mother read in the week. Dany puts on an old hat like Peter Pan and Ilia gets his water ball toy gun, chasing him like Captain Hook.

The mother shares that the children are very passionate about it. They memorize many new words while playing, as the mother invites them to put their argumentation during the play and to be more sophisticated in their dialogues. Within this context, she often helps them when building longer and more complicated phrases, instead of the short phrases that people usually use in their everyday conversation. So, apart from pure vocabulary, such plays help much in improving grammar skills as well, especially for children.

Regarding the proposed four techniques for easy acquisition and easy interaction between teacher and students in pre-school age in order to facilitate learning in English, it can be summarized that each of them impacts specific knowledge to students. E.g. The Cuisinaire rods increase the knowledge of mathematical vocabulary, while the words in context method develop the English vocabulary for everyday life and the visual stimuli in presenting words increase the vocabulary of the children in a more general perspective.

But their most important quality is in the many benefits they bring and the fact that they can be efficiently used both at home and at school. School is not the only place for learning, although it is crucial for the development of the personality and its preparation for active life through the socialization it offers. But about the learning process, it can be quite efficient in home ambiance as well.

The coronavirus pandemic actually forced parents to use more and more time at home to help their children in pre-school and in early school age to learn more efficiently. So there will be less and less place and time for separating school acquisition from acquisition at home and this is another very important argument in favor of developing and expanding such acquisitional practices that can be used both at home and at school.

A school year 2020 where traditional and digital acquisition may be used together and switched one to another is waiting for families across the globe and governments can no more guarantee if schools would not be closed again in the winter of 2020 due to the pandemic. This new and unexpected context of modern acquisition will definitely give priority exactly to methods that may be used both at school and at home and the actual research can be quite useful as methodology especially in this aspect.

The next chapter will reveal the results of the methods. Results from the application of the four mentioned methods on Ilia and Dany will be thoroughly discussed, also within the context of the benefits that each of them brings to the two kids in improving their vocabulary and how they consider them.

**IV. CHAPTER FOUR. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

In the actual chapter is discussed the reliability of the techniques outlined in the third chapter and their direct impact over the rationale of the research, the two kids Dany and Ilia. In aim to reveal the usefulness of the techniques a table is given below, showing through different indices the usefulness of every technique. The table is completed by the mother, based on her own experience with all the techniques.

After the test period of three months the mother is given a small cheat sheet to evaluate the performance of each technique implemented. The cheat sheet, contrary to the table, contains only open questions where the mother can share her own experience, recommendations, how did she feel during practicing all these techniques as she is not a professional pedagogue and implementing pedagogical techniques was a challenge for her. Analysis on how the kids react to each technique, how do they find it and how helpful it is for them is provided as well.

Starting with the direct impact of the four techniques is essential. The techniques are evaluated through different aspects and each aspect is assessed on a scale from 1 to 5 where answers vary from:

1. Not satisfied at all.

2. Mostly not satisfied.

3. Satisfied partially from the technique.

4. Very satisfied with the technique.

5. It is a technique I will continue to apply.

The outlined scale contains all the “shadows' ' of evaluation that a non-pedagogical specialist can distinguish during applying the techniques. Presented in a table view as the most appropriate one, this assessment tool actually gives the opportunity to the mother to share her overall impression with the acquisition process.

Not to neglect the fact that those techniques which can receive a high note from a non-professional at home ambiance, where scarcity of time and resources is evident, compared to a classical school, can prove as very good for school ambiance as well. Acquisition at home is indeed harder than at school, especially the acquisition in foreign languages where much professionalism, resources and time are needed.

The table contains four main criteria:

1. Positive effect on improving the vocabulary of the children – here the mother is told to assess the techniques mainly on the basis of how much did each of them help her children to improve their English vocabulary. As she is a native English speaker, she could very easily estimate if the technique is useful in the matter of enriching the vocabulary of Dany and Ilia with new words.

2. Easiness to apply for me – this criterion aims to give to the mother the opportunity to assess the technique as easy or complicated to apply. The mother is not a professional pedagogue; so, she has a clear view on is the technique easy or hard to practice by non-professionals when teaching bilingual kids in their native language.

3. Time consumption of the technique – this aspect is important especially in the context of the fact that the children and the mother must actually find time to learn English in their spare time at home. Especially the mother, who is busy with household and child keeping as well, and must fit the acquisition process in her schedule, which means that she can’t allocate the same time on teaching that a classical nursery or kindergarten is able to.

4. Resources consumption of the technique – another very important aspect, again bound to the fact that the four techniques are actually practiced at home and not in a classical school. It means that the mother has to allocate certain resources, including financial, in order to purchase the stuff to practice the acquisitional techniques. So she has the opportunity to evaluate through this criterion the resources worth the technique to practice.

**Table 1 Assessment of each technique by the mother during or immediately after the test period**

| **Number** | **Type of technique** | **Positive effect on improving vocabulary of the kids** | **Easiness to apply for me** | **Time consumption of the technique** | **Resources consumption of the technique** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1. | Cuisenaire rods | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| 2. | Montessori Letter Work | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. | Visual stimuli for presenting words | 5 | 5 | 3 | 5 |
| 4 a. | Play and learn methods – Egg toy capsule | 3 | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| 4 b. | Play and learn methods – Role play | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 |

The results on each criterion are graphically shown in Figure 1 as per assessed each criterion on the table.

**Figure 1 Techniques results as per Table 1.**



The techniques as assessed come in the following order by total mark:

* Cuisenaire rods – 4 + 4 + 4 + 4 = 16.
* Montessori Letter Work – 5 + 4 + 4 + 5 = 18
* Visual stimuli for presenting words – 5 + 5 + 3 + 5 = 18
* 4a. Play and learn methods – egg toy capsule – 3 + 5 + 4 + 4 = 16
* 4b. Play and learn methods – role play – 5 + 5 + 5 + 5 = 20.

The play and learn method comes first by a total mark of 20. It is followed by Montessori Letter Work and Visual Stimuli for presenting words that come both second by a total mark of 18. The Egg toy capsule and the Cuisenaire rods are third and have a total mark of 16. As seen from the results, apart from the first one, the other four ones come in two groups together with the same results.

This results order reveals that as most wanted comes the classical play and learn method, such as the role play which tops the class by maximal result. It is followed by the visual stimuli and the Montessori letter work which means that techniques which present information in a visually attractive and easy to do manner are also good to be practiced as home acquisition on languages. The next technique – egg toy capsule comes at the same place with Cuisenaire rods: the egg capsule has a low grade of 3 by impact on vocabulary and 4 on resources while the rods have only 4s. It implicitly states that some techniques that require buying additional stuff and using more time may not be so appropriate for home acquisition.

Still the information from the table is insufficient to find in depth the reasons why some techniques reveal as more successful than others. The mother who fills the table is native English speaker, so she is quite well aware of the progress that her children make in vocabulary with each technique. At the same time, she practices all the techniques during three whole months and can see for each of them the time and resources it takes to her. Finally, as a non-professional pedagogue she can clearly see if any technique is easier than another and can compare them. So the notes she gave on each technique on the scale from one to five may be considered as objective.

So in order to understand the in-depth meaning of the techniques, the use of the cheat sheet with the open questions’ answers is essential. The cheat sheet contains the following four questions where the mother can provide her feedback:

**1. What are the main benefits of each technique used during the last three months?** – Here the mother can provide a brief explanation on what are the benefits of each technique used.

**2.** **What are the main flaws of each technique used during the last three months?** – Here the mother can provide a brief explanation on what are the problems, the imperfections of each technique used.

**3.** **As a native English speaker, what can you recommend in order to improve English vocabulary acquisition for children?** – Here the mother can provide useful recommendations from her point of view as a native English speaker on how to improve vocabulary learning for children.

**4. What would be the perfect program for learning English vocabulary at home for no more than one or two hours per day? –** Here the mother can provide a plan and timetable for the exercises in English vocabulary that can help children to deepen their knowledge in the language.

The answers given by the mother are absolutely voluntary and each question is completed as follows:

**1. What are the main benefits of each technique used during the last three months?**

**1. Cuisenaire rods** – *They can quickly learn to sum numbers up which is useful indeed.*

**2. Montessori Letter Work –** *Making words by arranging letters improves kids’ writing skills.*

**3. Visual stimuli for presenting words –***They can see what I am talking about.*

**4a. Play and learn methods – egg toy capsule** *– They enjoy getting rewarded while learning some words.*

**4b. Play and learn methods – role play *–*** *They play and talk much which generally leaves me more time to do my stuff. I am just listening to them and correcting when needed.*

**1. What are the main flaws of each technique used during the last three months?**

**1. Cuisenaire rods** – *I have to help them with the rods, arranging them, etc. It takes time.*

**2. Montessori Letter Work –** *Sometimes difficult as I have to intervene each time when a letter is missing and invent words where available letters fit. It is a bit messy.*

**3. Visual stimuli for presenting words –***Net connection at home and a tablet always around me.*

**4a. Play and learn methods – egg toy capsule** *– An egg pays just a word, not many new words learnt. And it takes time pottering around for a shop to buy the eggs.*

**4b. Play and learn methods – role play *–*** *Nice indeed, sometimes the home gets a bit noisy.*

**3.** **As a native English speaker, what can you recommend in order to improve English vocabulary acquisition for children?** *I indeed like teaching English to my kids, but I think they need to use more original resources as well to learn it faster. More speaking helps you memorize more words. For writing skills, it is nice to practice some simple online tests as well, plenty of them on the net.*

**4. What would be the perfect program for learning English vocabulary at home for no more than one or two hours per day?** – *Two hours daily learning English seems to me quite impossible at home, especially doing plenty of housework alongside. So I could limit it to one hour. ☺*

*Still it is possible at kindergarten or nursery ambiance where one hour could be allocated in the morning and one in the afternoon, depending on the program. For the morning session, if available, children can get a short set of visual stimuli learning where they can see images and talk about with their teacher plus another role play of 30 minutes at last. This can fit well for those in preschool age, but I doubt that a kid before 5 can stay focused for an hour, so for the small ones the different sets of learning can be divided as twice per 30 minutes. And the afternoon session can include a twenty minutes of Cuisenaire rods, followed by a twenty minutes set of play with Montessori letter words and the final twenty minutes allocated to a role play. It seems to me great as kids will learn to sum numbers up, to write words and to speak confidently indeed, but it can be taught in an efficient manner to kids at the age of 5 or above, due to the overall difficulty of the exercises. So, no afternoon session to the small ones should be conducted, as it will be less efficient.*

Interpolating information from the table and the cheat sheet gives a clear image of the different techniques and why some of them are less useful at home. The main axis of differences passes through the time and the resources that some of them require. That is why when tailoring a curriculum on home-based language acquisition and on kindergarten- or school-based one this factor must be very well considered.

Resuming the essence of the techniques analysis in the chapter: it outlines that actually the mother seems least challenged at home ambiance only by the role play. But she reveals the main challenges that the other techniques put in a very clear manner:

* The Cuisinaire rods require more time from the tutor to oversee the process and are not so well compatible with the overall housework, especially when not applied by a professional pedagogue who is trained how to work fast with the kids with the rods. But they are very efficient in matter of developing the calculating skills of the kids and that is why the mother twice outlines this crucial advantage of them;
* The Montessori letter words are also sometimes time consuming and may be a bit difficult for home use. They also require space to arrange and it makes them more compatible with kindergarten ambiance. However the mother outlines as a crucial advantage of them that they develop writing skills;
* The visual stimuli – again sometimes difficult to do at home, as most of the new things that kids need to see in order to memorize are on the net. So the net connection reveals as important in aim to practice them;
* The egg toy capsule – it takes money and only a word is memorized by an egg which makes the process hard and costly for deep practice.

**V. CHAPTER FIVE. CONCLUSION**

The thesis focuses on learning English as a second language under the age of five, so until school age. The research question is how English can be taught to children under the age of 5, but in the focus of the home ambiance learning, not in learning in a specialized pedagogical institution such as kindergarten or private classes for kids.

The rationale of the research consists of two bilingual children who are taught English by their mother, an American national, while currently the family is living in Bulgaria. The children – Dany and Ilia – are English-Bulgarian speakers who need to deepen their knowledge in English grammar. They are at the age of three and at the age of five which puts a specific challenge on working with kids at a very young age when overall acquisition of vocabulary is quite complicated as they still can’t write and read confidently, just on a basic level.

The main methods used during the research are empirical and analytical. Empirical method consists of investigating how different acquisition practices, adapted for home learning, reveal as beneficial for the rationale of the research. Analytical method consists of offering analysis and conclusions over the trends that emerge in the results patterns and turning these conclusions into practical recommendations on how to teach English vocabulary to kids under school age.

Techniques are chosen amongst those who are quite popular in pedagogical ambiance and the main idea behind it is to see which ones of them can work efficiently at home as well. Home learning is quite different from kindergarten’s one and that is why it is important to make a wise choice on the techniques for home learning, especially when they won’t be practiced by a pedagogical professional which is exactly the case for the rationale of the study. The main techniques investigated in the research work are the following ones:

* Cuisenaire rods
* Montessori Letter Work
* Visual stimuli for presenting words
* 4a. Play and learn technique, the method of an egg toy capsule
* 4b. Play and learn technique, the method of role play

The analysis is made through two main tools. The first one is a table where each technique is assessed and evaluated by a mark in the scale from 1 to 5 by the mother who is actually occupied by the acquisition process of her children. The results from the table are represented in Table 1 (page 20) and visually they are summarized on figure 1 (page 21). The second one is an open questions cheat sheet where the mother has the opportunity to describe the main benefits and flaws of each technique by some phrases and to recommend improvements, as well as some best practices on how to tailor a good curriculum of activities for bilingual children in order to deepen their knowledge in English vocabulary. The recommendations of the mother – as an English speaker at native level – can be quite useful for the acquisition process of kids in preschool age no matter if they are or not even bilingual, as the activities proposed are quite general and suitable to apply for all.

The stakeholders of the research can be quite various. Some of the stakeholders were discussed in the introductory part as well, but deepening the research and the analysis lets to divide them into some well distinct groups as following:

1. The academic – academic in the pedagogical field can indeed benefit from the research by investigating the trends that emerge in the home learning of English language and how some specific techniques can be applied even by non professionals.

2. The teachers – they can use the research in their daily work by implementing some of the recommendations into their practice and even by using some of the techniques described. These techniques prove their efficiency even in home ambiance, so they can work even more efficiently in the ambiance of an English kindergarten or an English nursery as well.

3. The parents of bilingual children – as international marriages worldwide become more and more common, so parents of bilingual children simply must not miss the opportunity to teach their kids both the two languages. In the actual research they can find useful practical information on how to do it even at home, while not spending much time and resources.

4. The children – when they get used to some techniques they can even practice them by themselves alone which is quite time efficient especially within a family of two working parents or parents that are overall quite busy.

The research treats quite abundant information on different vocabulary acquisition techniques whose analysis brings the readers to interesting **conclusions**. The main conclusions of the research are as following:

*1. Some English vocabulary learning techniques can be efficiently practiced at home, apart from the fact that they are widespread in kindergarten and school ambiance. The analysis of the results reveals that maybe the best one is the role play. The role play does not take money or much time and can be practiced literally anywhere and at any time. It is just enough to have two participants ready to talk together on a topic and to imagine that they are two well known personalities who communicate with each other. That is why the improvised “Peter Pan '' play of Dany and Ilia received the highest mark as a technique for improving vocabulary by their mother: it is easy and efficient.*

*2. English vocabulary techniques can develop at the same time the computing of the kids: it brings more than one benefit apart from the pure vocabulary enriching benefit. Such methods are the Cuisenaire rods that help children to improve their mathematical skills. That is why even the mother admits that this technique is not so easy for a non-professional like hers, but at the same time she also says that it is quite efficient for developing the mathematical skills of her sons.*

*3. English vocabulary is not only an oral skill but also the skill to write confidently. The technique of Montessori letter words aims exactly this: to help kids to memorize not only how to say a word, but also how to write it by arranging the different letters in order to make a word. The American mother of Dany and Ilia outlines this important connection between developing vocabulary and writing skills by this method, although it may require more time and space to practice.*

*4. English vocabulary needs a good visual representation. The kids memorize easily what they see and it makes visual expression crucial for the good acquisition process. That is why the technique of visual stimuli should find a good place in the vocabulary learning process. It may be implemented through simple pointing out of the objects and naming them, so that the kids memorize their names. It can be done by means of a tablet where the kids can see different objects that are not materially present around them and to learn their names. It can even be done in a more creative way by bringing the children outside, at camping or at excursion and to show them things they are less likely to have seen in the city such as some insects, flowers and other plants.*

*5. English vocabulary techniques must keep a good balance between resources efficiency, time efficiency and immediate effect on the ability of the kids to speak confidently. Especially at home ambiance techniques must be affordable to bilingual families in terms of time and funds, so that everybody can use them. A bad balance between results-time-money is most likely to push a bilingual parent from using a specific technique away, as is the case of Dany and Ilia’s mother.*

Based on the conclusions above, some practical recommendations may be addressed to professionals that work with children in preschool age in teaching them English. These recommendations are more general and can be used either for learning English at home or at kindergarten.

These recommendations are focused on the practical organization of the work of the pedagogues or the parents, the scheduling and they do not aim to repeat the conclusions or to recommend a specific technique. The choice of acquisition techniques is in the hands of the teachers, respectively to the parents in the case of homeschooling, and they can fully use the conclusions of the actual research in aim to assess which one or which ones of the techniques would work best.

These **recommendations** are mainly extracted from the recommendations of the Native English speaking mother which makes them good for consideration both by parents teaching their native language to their children and by English teaching pedagogues as well:

*1. The activities should be well-balanced and tailored mostly to the age of the participants in the class. For homeschooling and kindergarten one session from up to one hour are most suitable for kids under five years old and, preferably, this session to be divided into two or three sets of activities. This is done in aim to ensure that the small kids are concentrated on the work to do.*

*2. For children that are already five years old there may be considered two sessions each of one hour at pre-school or home ambiance. Each session should be made up again of various sets of activities.*

*3. A good variety of activities is to be recommended when working with children up to preschool age. The reason justifying why activities must be various is that it is the only way to develop the full potential of the skills of the children: mathematical, writing, oral or thinking skills. Apart from usefulness, a variety of activities makes the overall learning process more enjoyable for kids.*

Finally and within the context of everything discussed above, a further path for research that can be investigated by academics is how a foreign language can be taught more efficiently to larger groups of children who are at home. Currently even on the net most of the classes in English are individual, as usually subscribers pay a fee to have a class with a tutor. But isn’t it very time efficient and resources efficient to deepen the academic pedagogical knowledge on how to teach large groups of children at home, even online? It may be a very important issue especially within the context of the current pandemic of coronavirus if schools around the world are closed again. So a food for thought but also a bet on the linguistic acquisition of millions of kids will be to find ways on how to improve the techniques of remote mass English teaching. It can be crucial for the next generation of young professionals to come and that is why research is highly recommended.

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