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CREATING AN ENGLISH-SPEAKING DIGITAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR PRESCHOOLERS: LINGUODIDACTIC ASPECT

Abstract. Recent changes in the Ukrainian language policy have drawn public attention to the issue of shaping an English-speaking digital learning environment for preschool children and have urged researchers to examine the matter from the standpoint of linguodidactics. The pedagogical benefits of mastering English as a second language by preschoolers alongside their mother tongue and their native culture have been studied. A thorough analysis of language acquisition theories has been made in the article. In the context of sociocultural theory, the core role of parents (caregivers) as the child's initial teachers (pedagogues) and creators of English digital learning environment is outlined. The author has provided guidelines on learning English as a second language based on the supportive use of digital learning tools in English at an early age. The article provides a definition of the term *English-speaking digital learning environment*. The current research showcases the use of digital learning tools for interpersonal and intercultural communication between adults and a child. The didactic value of English vlogs and cartoons as the most interesting and engaging audiovisual support for children's English language communicative competence formation is determined. The author provides case examples of how game techniques of miming, dressing up, dramatising, acting out and role-playing cartoons and vlogs scenarios may be employed. A number of online educational platforms and applications designed for learning English have been analysed according to target audience, objectives, content, linguistic, and didactic accuracy. The author has designed a framework of English-speaking digital learning environment formation on three levels: family, educational institutions, and state. The effectiveness of the suggested guidelines on how to create a favourable English digital learning environment for preschool children has been corroborated on the basis of questionnaires and interviews with parents in the kindergarten.

Keywords: English as a second language; digital learning environment; preschoolers; parents; digital learning tools; theory of language acquisition.

1. INTRODUCTION

Problem statement. The past decade has been characterised by extensive and widespread use of digital technologies in all areas of human life. As we integrate digital tools into our daily routine, we can see how business, healthcare, laws, public service, and education evolve with it. In particular, the educational potential of technological progress provides innovative solutions to instruction at different stages and creates a universal digital educational space regardless of the geographical position of a student. The crucial role of digital technologies should be emphasised for facilitating and accelerating communication and intercultural interaction worldwide.

In present days, a globalised world community promotes English as a lingua franca, defining the language to be a vital tool in international communication and trade. According to the statistical data, good command of English is immensely important. It is considered to be the state language in 67 countries. 31% of the world's population speaks English. As a

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result of the all-encompassing digitalisation of our society, 60% of the World Wide Web's content is in the English language [1].

In the era of artificial intelligence (AI), English proficiency is crucial if one wishes to obtain high-quality education, employability, and ongoing professional development in a multilingual community. In today's world, a fluent command of the English language in conjunction with IT knowledge will boost your career. It is common knowledge that the most successful and highly developed IT companies originate from English-speaking countries (e.g. the USA, Canada, the UK, Australia, etc.). In addition, we should emphasise the role of age in learning English. A young age is the best period for a child to acquire second language skills alongside the child's mother tongue.

Nowadays, the ability to speak English is not a surprising fact about a person, regardless of his or her age, place of residence, nationality, ethnicity, status, position, religious affiliation, etc. It is quite unusual not to speak English—particularly in view of Ukraine's pending integration into the political, legislative, military, economic, social, and educational space of the European Union and also given the circumstances of Russia's war against Ukraine.

The increasing mobility, plurality, and complexity have greatly influenced the Council of Europe's Language Policy at the end of the 20th century. The concept of plurilingual and intercultural education was designed and construed as an education taking place in and through cultural and linguistic diversity in societies [2, p. 15]. A great number of recent Ukrainian laws ("The Law on Conceptual Principles of Secondary School Reform", The Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, The State Standards of Preschool (Primary, Secondary, Higher Education)) [3] – [5] stipulate ten competences to be achieved: communication in the national language; competence in Science and Technology; lifelong learning skills; communication in foreign languages (English and another one); mathematical literacy; the sense of entrepreneurship; cultural awareness, environmental awareness and healthy lifestyles; social and civic competence. These competences should be shaped and developed coherently and consistently on all levels of education, in addition to integrating closely with each other.

English communicative competence is one of the core skills in modern days. The Ukrainian educational document ("The Methodical Guidelines pertaining to Quality of English Learning, Teaching, and Use in Higher Educational Institutions", 2023) [6] promotes the prestigious status of English. Moreover, on 22nd November 2023, a new law [7] was adopted, entitled "Law on the Use of English Language in Ukraine" which provides for the introduction of English as an official language for business, education, and culture nationwide. According to the law, English is suggested to become an obligatory component of preschool education. We absolutely concur with the idea of teaching English from an early age, as it is the best time to do so, considering linguodidactic issues related to the formation of children's articulation types, phonemic awareness, and shaping of an overall 'picture of a language'.

However, a thorough analysis of the Basic Component of Preschool Education [5, p. 29] functioning as the State Standard for Preschool Education in Ukraine shows that, at the preschool level, English is still an optional component. This contradicts the provisions of the above-mentioned legislative acts. Meanwhile, it should be aimed at compulsory teaching and learning English by listening and speaking, with a broad range of social and cultural contexts and shaping the skills of interaction and intercultural communication in order to form preschool children's ability to adequately understand the English language and culture and to express the ideas, thoughts, feelings, facts and views at the Pre-A1 level in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) [8].

Meanwhile, modern-day children are increasingly immersed in the digital environment. In the USA, the Academy of Pediatrics [9] has stated that, in 1970, children began to regularly watch TV at the age of 4 years today, children begin interacting with digital media at the age of 4 months. According to American surveys, in 2011, 52% of children aged 0 to 8 had access to a mobile device (although only 38% had ever used one). By 2013, this access had increased to 75% of 0- to 8-year-olds. The report identified the risks and benefits of digital media use [9]. The risks to children's health are safety issues (exposure to inaccurate, inappropriate, or unsafe content and contacts; compromised privacy and confidentiality of a child) and negative health effects (impact upon sleep, attention, and learning; a higher incidence of obesity and depression; aggressive behaviour; cardiovascular problems and body mass index). However, as they enjoy double-click access to online content, modern children very often listen and watch a variety of informative interactive audio and video materials via mobile apps, social and digital media, online educational platforms, video games, software tools, etc. Evidence-based benefits identified from the use of digital and social media include early learning, exposure to new ideas and knowledge, and increased opportunities for social contact and support [9].

Thus, due to new educational challenges in the digital age, it is high time we transformed Ukrainian preschool education with the help of creating an English-speaking digital learning environment for preschoolers.

Analysis of recent studies and publications. The benefits of video-based learning in early childhood have been studied by the academic community worldwide (M. Krcmar, L. Ṛobin, M. Trosethe, G. Strousse, M. Saylor, M. Ṛice, A. Huston, Ṛ. Truglio, J. Wright, L. Guernsey, H. Hayne, J. Heberte, G. Simcock, S. Ṛoseberry, K. Hirsh-Pasek, Ṛ. Golinkoff, D. Linebarger. S. Vaala, E. Vanderwater, et al.).

In the study of parents' motives for allowing early use of screen media by a child [10], education is considered to be at the top of the list.

In other scientific papers [11] – [14] published overseas, authors stress the importance of joint engagement and interaction with young (24-30-month-old) children in conjunction with language learning (e.g. words) using videos.

Other authors have noted the positive effect of watching TV shows by preschoolers as such activity expands their vocabulary [15] – [17].

A number of studies [18] – [20] have corroborated the educational impact of video-based learning on a child's intelligence development, socialisation, communication skills, development of their creativity, etc.

A wide range of academic papers (M. Juma, I. Yonus, P. Kuhl, O. Khomyshak) [21] – [24] focus on language learning on the basis of various digital media (YouTube videos, animated cartoons, captions, video clips, etc.).

Numerous Ukrainian academic studies underscore the pedagogical benefits of using digital learning and teaching technologies in primary school (O. Karpiuk, O. Bihych, O. Kotenko, L. Havrilova), in secondary school (S. Nikolaeva, O. Shestopaluyk, V. Ṛedko, T.Polonska), and in higher education (N. Mayer, I. Zadorozhna, L. Morska, V. Chernysh, T. Koval). These studies emphasise the linguodidactic value of digital tools in the process of shaping and developing English communicative competence (linguistic, sociocultural, pragmatic, information and digital, etc.).

A general theoretical framework of an English-speaking digital learning environment formation has been devised by V. Bykov, M. Zhaldak, V. Lapinskyi, O. Spirin, O. Spivakovskyi, et al.

However, based on a detailed analysis, we have not found ideas for solving such issues as using digital technologies in learning English by preschoolers, formation of digital literacy

of parents and young learners in Ukraine, principles of digital teaching English in the kindergarten, etc.

Considering the modern-day challenges faced by the Ukrainian educational community, **the purpose of our study** is to design a framework of an English-speaking digital learning environment for preschool children in the light of linguodidactics and suggest guidelines on how to use digital learning tools which parents could follow to ensure successful and efficient learning of English as a second language.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The research is based on a wide range of theoretical methods of investigation:

- scientific overview and critical analysis of the legislation, pedagogical, and psycholinguistic sources;
- systematisation and generalisation of scientific facts and information;
- comparison.

The empirical basis of the academic paper comprises scientific observation, the best practices of foreign education, conversation, interviewing, questionnaire of preschoolers' parents, detailed interpretation of the results in order to determine the feasibility of the suggested learning guidelines with the aim of an English-speaking digital learning environment shaping for children.

In the course of the study, 39 parents (mothers and fathers, caregivers) were interviewed in a public kindergarten No. 13 situated in Drohobych City, Lviv region, Ukraine. In order to corroborate (or disprove) the accuracy and correctness of guidelines on shaping a digital environment for English learning, the said questionnaire addressed the following issues and asked the questions:

1. Do you consider learning English at an early age to be useful for your child's development?
   a) yes b) not enough c) no

2. Is your child learning English at the kindergarten?
   a) yes b) yes, but not in the kindergarten environment c) no

3. What difficulties do you face as your child is learning English at the kindergarten?
   a) financial b) pedagogical c) psychological d) methodical
   e) administrative f) language difficulties g) other (please specify)

4. 4. Is your child a confident mobile phone (iPod, iPad, PC) user?
   a) yes b) yes, but not a confident one c) no

5. Have you found the suggested guidelines to be useful for creating an English-speaking digital learning environment for your child?
   a) yes b) not useful enough c) no

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

Based on a thorough reflection, synthesis, analysis and empirical study, it should be noted that modern methods of teaching a foreign language have been developing in the light of linguodidactics. As a new science, it was introduced by the academic community at the end

of the 20th century. Linguodidactics deals with the theory of foreign language teaching aimed at the study of the interaction of multiple phenomena (language, consciousness, culture, society) and the enhancement of knowledge about teaching and learning a foreign language. A multitude of definitions of this term can be found in modern-day scientific papers (V. Ṛedko, T. Polonska, T. Vakaliuk, O. Osova, O. Chernysh, et al.). However, in the context of our research, the following definition of linguodidactics [25] can not be neglected, as it considers a branch of science studying students' evolution with a new language and culture in conjunction with their native language and culture.

Firstly, the study is focused on the process of learning English as a second language by preschoolers alongside their mother tongue. According to the International Standard Classification of Education [5], we distinguish between early childhood education (level 0: 0-3-year-old children) and preschool age (3-6/7-year-old children). Overseas researchers [13, p. 176] assert that "[t]he abilities to understand and use language represent two of the most important developmental competencies that children must master during the first 3 years of life". As we are set to emphasise the crucial role of preschool age for learning a second language from the standpoint of linguodidactics, it should be noted that parents (caregivers) are the child's firtsmost pedagogues from his or her early age. As they provide positive behavioural and language patterns, they are shaping his or her personality on the basis of their interaction—all to the benefit of the child's moral, social, spiritual, communicative, intelligent, emotional, and physical development [11] – [13]. The child's parents (caregivers)—mothers in particular—are supposed to be the initial carriers and the first-ever presenters of human speech. It is not surprising that a toddler hears and reacts to his mother's voice immediately, as he or she has possessed this ability even in the womb. Later, speech patterns transmitted in the mother tongue can be identified by a child due to melody and intonation. We can therefore assert that parents are acting as transmitters of speech patterns in the course of their everyday interaction with their child. This comes with immense pedagogical, social and communicative benefits, as they may have a great impact on the development of the child's communicative skills (or, in regrettable cases, a lack thereof—case in point: the Mowgli syndrome).

In this paper, we distinguish between Language Acquisition and Learning a Second Language. Language Acquisition pertains to the mother tongue, which is not an innate phenomenon. Children start speaking the language of their family, regardless of it belonging to one or different ethnic group. This language can be identified as Mother Tongue. Language acquisition is the process of acquiring the ability to understand and communicate in a language perceptively and productively, as a native speaker [26, p. 92]. To that end, a child should know phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, vocabulary, and how to use these linguistic tools in speech perception and production. Thus, the awareness of the fact that one's primary language is one's mother tongue language is something that is gained later when one is at school. Meantime, as we deal with a second language, we should note that its learning can take place spontaneously in a bilingual family or a bilingual society, and this process would result in the formation of a secondary linguistic personality. That said, the core theories of language acquisition are of great interest to our research.

The first theory should be considered from the standpoint of behaviourism, according to which desired behaviour is followed by "reward" and undesired behaviour results in "punishment". The behavioural psychologist I. Pavlov showed how a dog could be made to associate the ringing of a bell with food. "Operant conditioning is a theory of behaviourism, a learning perspective that focuses on changes in an individual's observable behaviours" [27].

Thereupon, B. Skinner [28, 7] expanded these ideas and proved "that all behaviours were in some way a result of operant conditioning". He emphasised the importance of positive reinforcement or rewards for the desired behaviour and the (sort of) punishment for

undesirable behaviour. However, this theory of his is quite restricted one, as it suggests that language might only be learnt by way of imitation. Theoreticians deal with *language as a habit*—based on repetition and substitution drilling, and also stress the importance of positive reinforcement. A child is regarded as a *tabula rasa* whereas language is viewed as nurturing—hence, learning a language is considered to be a process that is dependent upon conditions of learning rather than on the learner. Imitation, quite undoubtedly, is of great value to language development; it is, however, not the sole source of linguistic knowledge for a child at different stages of his or her life. Besides, in our case, it should be noted that the idea of *learning by repetition and imitation* also brings the issue of children's mistake-making into the spotlight.

An opposing point of view was presented by N. Chomsky [29, p. 44], who suggested the idea of children's innate understanding of grammar using a *language acquisition device* (LAD). The reflection of the innativist perspective is definitely a reaction against the behaviourist approach. This theory furthers the idea that learners are actually using their brains to find patterns while they are hypothesising, analysing, and deducing information. N. Chomsky underlined that the critical, sensitive period for a child's language learning was from age 0 to age 8–9 years. He thought that there was a specific part of the brain dedicated to learning languages and that each and every human being had this built-in learning ability. Human minds are actively involved in the learning process, as well as they have to identify patterns and work out rules and experiments. Making mistakes is something that is considered to be an important part of the learning process [26, p. 99]. Strengths of this theory include, *inter alia*, overextension and impressive speech. As far as its weaknesses are concerned, we would like to figure out the interaction omitted by the scientist as a milestone in language acquisition.

As for constructivist points of view, people are involved throughout their whole lives, as they construct their knowledge on the basis of personal understanding of experiences. Everybody does it in his or her unique way. The work of J. Piajet was particularly influential in the development of constructivist ideas. These ideas had important implications for language teaching, as learners were exposed to a new language and incorporated this new knowledge into their existing knowledge. The core idea was the idea of knowledge modification [26]. J. Bruner was an important figure in the constructivist school of thought. He argued that learners had to know how to learn and develop their cognitive capacities by being absorbed in challenging and meaningful problems. Constructivism consists of the idea that we are able to re-construct our reality through experience, as we use our brains - but we are able to do so when and if placed in a specific context in which we find ourselves [26, p. 101].

Alternatively, sociocultural theory does not separate the individuals from the context in which they are learning. Learning is a social process which is "a two-way street". The social context has an impact on the individual - the individual, however, also influences the social context - by virtue of his or her participation. L. Vygotsky was one of the most influential psychologists in this area. Other scientists have applied his ideas specifically to learning a language - particularly, to learning a foreign language. In his studies, he focuses on what happens when the learner is faced with something that is a little bit beyond or above his or her current level of mastery. Here, it is important to take into account peers, teachers and parents who are above the current level of the learner. They can use *scaffolding* to help the learner get to the next level. The space between what the learner can do at the moment and what he or she can do with some help is called the *zone of proximal development* [27]. This theory emphasises the crucial part which Scaffolding and Zone of Proximal Development play in the process of language acquisition (e.g. discussing, working in groups, negotiating, sharing

learning strategies, doing cognitive tasks, verbalising the action, etc.). Thus, interaction is of vital importance [26, p. 102].

Having analysed a range of language acquisition theories, we may well say that each of the theories is somewhat imperfect, as neither of these covers the subject of our language learning in a holistic manner; instead, each of the said theories only reveals aspects from a certain standpoint. However, the last theory mentioned is the most accurate and appropriate one in today's social and cultural context, as far as our research is concerned.

Furthermore, in view of the subject of our study, we draw on the sociocultural theory in the light of second language learning. In our case, we deal with English as it is the most popular vehicle of global communication nowadays.

Parents (caregivers) - acting as the child's initial pedagogues - create and support the educational space for their children's development - in particular, for a second language learning - early in his or her childhood. "Language learning takes place in the context of social interactions…" [12, p. 156]. Recent studies argue that "early language development is stimulated by the linguistic input that an infant hears on a regular basis. The most proximal and influential of these sources are parents, siblings, other children and adults living in the immediate household, and the myriad of other environmental sounds to which infants are exposed" [13, p. 176]. Accordingly, it should be said that, firstly, parents, caregivers, relatives or close people play a prominent role in second language learning based on social interaction and positive environment shaping from the child's young age [13].

With that in mind, we recommend parents (caregivers) start speaking English at home beginning with exposure to second language sounds and rhythm from their children's earliest age (as early as starting at age of 6 months) [10]. In order to be able to construct and foster a bilingual environment, it would be perfect for parents themselves to master a second language - at least at an elementary level - in order to communicate and interact with a child by listening and retelling (reading) fairytales, singing songs or speaking English in real-life situations while walking, going to the café (zoo, cinema, circus etc), travelling abroad, and discussing miscellaneous matters (including current news, daily activities, food, shopping, etc.). In this way, a child would be able to shape the picture of the world in the English language simultaneously with the acquisition of his or her mother tongue. Positive patterns of spoken English provided by parents will evoke children's better perception, curiosity, and interest in learning a second language and studying its culture, as they will become eager to listen to and speak English at any time and in any setting.

It should be said that second language learning is a long-term process consisting of decoding and pattern-finding in the child's brain. Growing up, a child is able to focus his or her eye and attention longer and becoming more interested in people (besides mother) surrounding him or her - interested in new voices, objects, places, events etc. In view of this, adults might play English audio materials in the background, such as lullabies, songs, nursery rhymes, chants, bedtime stories, tune in to a radio station, or listen to audio podcasts with their toddlers. Aiming to shape children's reception, rhythm, pitch and intonation skills, parents should create an English-speaking environment for kids from early childhood. We therefore suggest parents start with active repetitive listening to English-speaking audio and video content which would help them master English as a second language in their everyday life.

Numerous scientific studies [10] – [13] and observations prove the beneficial effect of active use of digital technologies in education by young people of different age groups. At the same time, the American Academy of Pediatrics [9] does not recommend exposing children under the age of 2 years to screen media. Having taken this into account, it would be quite natural to suggest that parents who are not confident English language users themselves create

an English-speaking digital learning environment aimed at second language acquisition in childhood - particularly as far as preschool learners are concerned.

The academic paper [13, p.177] proves the educational benefits of early learning from the screen, as "media stimuli […] encompass the visual, verbal, and visual/verbal content that can be delivered via multiple devices". In this way, digital natives are provided with opportunities to listen and watch a variety of peoples, languages, cultures and lifestyles, across time and place, with the aid of digital technologies. Thus, considering priorities emerging out of globalisation, intercultural, and multicultural policies, one can use digital learning tools to intensify second language learning at preschool age. Educational objectives may be achieved by active digital learning tools use that are based on watching digital media content which would evoke children's positive emotions and help them grasp the idea of what is happening in those pieces of content. At this stage, it will be useful to watch English-speaking digital videos in order to create an English-speaking atmosphere. Video material instantly attracts and absorbs children's attention, as it combines music, sound, vivid, multicoloured animated characters, and events. Visual support is considered to be the best mnemonic technique for English learning in childhood. By and large, images presented in a video improve the child's understanding of new words and new content [11], [12]. However, researchers stress [13, p. 176] "the presence of a competent co-viewer to boost babies' language learning from screen media, much like the ways these processes facilitate learning in live scenarios". With that in mind, it should be argued that the role of parents/caregivers is of vital importance in shaping an English-speaking digital learning environment for preschool children.

In recent research, a wide range of definitions of "information and digital environment" can be found that are addressing pedagogical conditions of such "space formation" at different educational levels (school, university, etc.) [30], [31]. An online dictionary [25] offers the following definition: "learning environment: a set of external and internal conditions of students' evolutions with a foreign language and culture and awareness of students' native language and culture". Meanwhile, the digital learning environment is defined as "a virtual space for teaching and learning" [25]. In the current study, we suggest sticking to a new term, i.e., "*English-speaking digital learning environment for preschoolers"*, and defining it as *"a systematic unity of English–speaking linguistic and cultural repertoire in a digital format supported legislatively, scientifically, and methodically which is managed and overseen by parents, teachers, volunteers with digital learning tools (apps, online educational platforms, computer software, social (digital) media) use.*"

Dealing with videos in the light of English digital learning environment shaping for preschool children, we highlight the significance of visual perception of information—and recording information—in real-life situations, all in order to shape one's English communication competence. Videos present a number of miscellaneous speakers (adults or kids) with unique voices, accents, pronunciation, rhythm, and melody in order to form phonological habits and to better understand what is being said. Based on the simultaneous combination of sound and picture, videos provide the opportunity to observe the speaker's face, emotions, body language, and gestures—all of which will improve content comprehension by children. Learning English through videos is a great source of social and cultural information. Watching videos is useful for linguistic competence formation, as they are equipped with a lot of language repetitions (vocabulary and grammar structures) supported by pictures [21], [23]. Exciting videos prompt young learners to reproduce speech and behaviour patterns by attracting their attention, enhancing kids' auditory and visual memory, developing listening comprehension and communication skills, and overall 'moulding' preschoolers [14] – [16], [20]. In view of the above - and taking into account the

child's age, of course - we emphasise the importance of authenticity, length, picture and sound quality, interest, motivation, and educational value of videos for learning English.

Our latest study [24], in particular, analyses the psychological and pedagogical strengths of English YouTube video clips and their value as a resource and a cognitive tool for Ukrainian children's learning during the Russia-Ukraine war. It is asserted that YouTube channels are the most popular video hosting service among young learners worldwide. Considering the amount of YouTube subscribers, we suggested watching and listening to its English kids content with the aim of developing children's cognitive, psychological, social, cultural, and communicative facilities. We prepared the list of the most popular children's YouTube channels and pinpointed criteria for selecting English-language YouTube video clips aimed at young learners. The didactic potential of using English YouTube video clips for children's learning has been classified by themes, vocabulary, and speech patterns. A three-step procedure of emotionally motivated, cognitive and creative communicative activities based on using English YouTube video clips for young learners has been provided [24, p. 29].

In addition, a bulk of interesting video materials for children can be searched for on the Internet. We shall focus on video blogs, animated cartoons, video games, and digital stories.

Video blogging (vlogging) is a current phenomenon in the digital era. It is defined as an online diary with video content. Kids' video blogs (vlogs) broadcast views held by bloggers, their daily routines, culture, entertainment, activities, and suchlike. Most video blogs are English-speaking, so young learners can listen to English in a real-life situation, watch and study another culture, learn to speak in a second language by imitating, acting, dramatising or pretending to be popular bloggers. English vlogs for children are compared and contrasted in Table 1.

Table 1.

Comparison of English vlogs for children

№	Vblog title	Subscribers	Date of foundation	Country	Communication domains	Didactic value
1.	**"Woolly and Tig"** *https://m.youtube.com/channel/UCLN5ButOQ8y2_TlOIs8_RWw*	3 million	12.05.2014	UK	Personal, public	Shaping English communicative competence: ➢ *audiovisual comprehension skills*
2.	**"Blippi"** *https://www.youtube.com/@Blippi/about?app=desktop*	18 million	27.01.2014	USA	Personal, public	Shaping English communicative competence: ➢ *linguistic competence (lexical, grammar, pronunciation and intonation skills);* ➢ *audiovisual comprehension and speaking skills*
3.	**"Kids Diana Show"** *https://www.youtube.com/@KidsDianaShow*	113 million	12.05.2015	Ukraine-USA	Personal, public	Shaping English communicative competence: ➢ *audiovisual comprehension skills*

Woolly and Tig [32] is a British series of 5-minute live-action drama episodes featuring Tig, a three-year-old girl, and her toy spider Woolly. This vlog has been selected due to the fact that the content in question is delivered in British English. Episodes focus on feelings experienced by children as a result of new events in their lives. The character of Tig is played by a three-year-old Betsy McCredie. The character of Dad is played by Colin McCredie,

Betsy's father; Mum is played by Jenny Ryan, Betsy's real-life aunt; whereas the series is narrated by Maisie McCredie, Betsy's elder sister.

Blippi [33] is an American channel offering educational videos for kids as they explore the wondrous world with everyone's best friend Blippi. This vlog is prioritised in view of the fact that children are exposed to American English in it. Besides, there are so many exciting things to explore and learn in the videos. As they are watching the vlog, children will become increasingly curious to learn about vehicles, animals, the natural world, and so much more. Blippi helps children understand the world, and expands their vocabulary. Blippi loves visiting exciting places such as children's museums or the zoo. He loves singing, dancing, playing and exploring. His contagious curiosity encourages young viewers to learn, watch, and experience adventures that help them to grow and develop.

Children's interests and likes dictate the choice of the next vlog in our selection. *Kids Diana Show* [34] is a Ukrainian-American YouTube vlog. It all began with Diana's parents who started making YouTube videos of their daughter and their newborn son, Roma, back in Ukraine. The channel's popularity skyrocketed as it hit one million subscribers in just over a year. Later, the family relocated to the USA, where they continued producing children's animated series and role-play-oriented content. At present, their YouTube channel is the 5th most-viewed and 5th most-subscribed worldwide. In the videos, Diana, Roma, and their parents play, learn, sing, explore, and share their life experiences. Millions of kids and families from all over the world join Diana and Roma every day to explore the world, and learn about songs, numbers, nature, colours, shapes, animals, and the importance of eating healthy food, washing hands, being a good friend, and many other useful things.

A detailed analysis of English-speaking vlogs for children corroborates their didactic potential. The content is diverse in terms of entertainment and education. We consider the *Blippi* vlog to be the most appropriate from the standpoint of linguodidactics, as it aims at shaping more components of English communicative competence (lexical, grammar, pronunciation, and intonation habits), and audiovisual comprehension and speaking skills. Moreover, this vlog is based on the content and language integrated learning approach.

In order to boost the child's all-round development and shape his or her second language proficiency in real-life situations, we suggest parents use a variety of video-based activities.

Pre-watching activities include taking a look at a video blog title and captions, watching a silent video, advertisement, or a trailer with the help of which children would become eager to get an idea of what it is going to be about and discuss the video.

Video-based learning is more exciting and creative when it is used in a variety of interesting and funny ways. Parents can suggest children make their own video blogs and tell about daily routines, showing activities at the weekend or holidays, etc. Presentation of children's interests, hobbies, humour, wishes, and congratulations can be recorded in a video blog in order to practice English-speaking skills at the elementary level.

A prerequisite for the next activity, "*I am in the video*", is to ask a child to imagine himself/herself as the main character of the video to describe his or her emotions, ideas, and thoughts pertaining to the plot of the video, using some new words from the video blog recently watched.

Video-based activities suggested by parents may comprise a description of the video, sounds, music, colours, main characters, events, and content of the video—all in order to come up with a new title for it or to produce an advertisement.

After they have watched the video, children can be asked to play dress-up games, role-play, act out or dramatise the most fascinating scenes of the video blogs, in order to improve their creativity and fluency by practising pronunciation and communication skills.

The cartoon is the most adorable video material for children. They become highly motivated and interested in learning English via cartoons [17], [21], [22]. The synergy of voice and images helps understand the content better. Vivid colours, excellent sound, music, artistic voiceover, 3D-animated events and characters of the cartoon grasp children's attention from the very first minute and make an immense positive impact on concentration, duration, switching, as well as on improving memory. As they are watching a cartoon, preschoolers learn new vocabulary and grammatical structures and shape their linguistic competence and listening comprehension skills [17] – [19], [21]. After having watched a cartoon several times, it is recommended to pronounce new vocabulary and speech patterns for the main characters in order to form rhythm, pronunciation and intonation skills. It may be suggested that children imitate the cartoon's statements, questions, exclamations and imperative sentences more vigorously, faster, or slower, in order to enhance dramatisation and role-playing effect, having fun in general. To that end, there is plenty of English modern-day cartoons available on the Internet, such as *Gogo loves English, BBC: Muzzy*, *English Singsing, Crawford the Cat*, *Appu – the Yogic Elephant, Bananas in Pyjamas, Sesame Street, Blue's Clues, Pocoyo, Peppa Pig, Caillou* and so on).

Storytelling is also very popular among children, who enjoy the ritual of bedtime stories. In a digital age, preschoolers' parents can use English ready-made digital books aimed at learning English by listening, watching digital stories, and discussing the characters and plot. Digital storytelling provides a great English learning opportunity: linguistic simplicity, visual support, language repetition, memorable lexis, intonation, and rhythm.

Another exciting way of using this activity is asking children to create their digital books with the help of a ***Storyjumper*** software tool by picking up topic-related Internet images, photos or kids' pictures [35, p. 132]. In such a way, young learners pretend to be directors bringing their fairytales, stories, cartoons, and comic strips to life. In order to develop speaking skills, they may voice over the story based on new English words.

In the current period, the Internet is the most popular source of information. Online educational platforms and their educational potential have such advantages as instant access to reliable, high-quality, and subject-oriented information. The following websites designed by professional instructors are analysed in this research: **www.learnenglishkids, www.cambridgeenglish.org, www.elt.oup.com, www.kids.nationalgeographic.com,** etc.

The most renowned online educational platform is **LearnEnglishKids**—courtesy of British Council—offering a supportive digital learning environment for children. This interactive platform encompasses a variety of language and speech activities (songs, videos, games, poems, stories) targeting learners of different ages, interests, and language proficiency levels. In the context of our research, the most valuable resource offered here are tips provided to parents whose child is learning English.

Another interactive platform for kids, **www.abc.linguist.ua**, has been designed by a Ukrainian publishing house. It encourages children to learn the English alphabet through games. There is a great variety of linguistic games on the website, specifically: *Popping Balloons*, aimed at developing visual perception and English letter identification, *Catch the Words* which can be used to develop the correlation between word graphic images and pronunciation if a child is ready for such an activity, *Guess the Word*, an online test for lexical drilling; and *Memory Game* which is supposed to develop involuntary attention and stimulate concentration—which is of crucial importance to present-day Ukrainian kids as they are learning English in national emergency conditions.

The **www.cambridgeenglish.org** platform is aimed at practising English by young learners using a game entitled *Monkey Puzzles*. This interactive video game is designed to learn, improve, and test one's command of the English language in a safe, motivated, and fun way. The game provides the opportunity to visit Monkey's favourite places (zoo, park, party,

snowball fight etc.), all in order to shape children's communication skills and engage them in a curious online educational adventure.

The **www.kidsnstionalgeographic.com** is an American educational online tool encompassing a number of high-quality, standards-based, educational resources and activities about the world and the way it functions, evoking child's interest and ideas of its enhancement. A massive amount of free English content (including games, videos, maps, lesson plans, imagery, interactive activities, and references) is designed on the basis of a holistic approach used by National Geographic to address science, exploration, and storytelling.

Moreover, a wide range of cutting-edge applications (*Duolingo, Babbel, Busuu, Lingokids, Beelinguapp, LingoDeer* etc) is designed to learn English in an interesting way anytime, anywhere. Using a smartphone, one can search for puzzles, quizzes, or action games. With that in mind, it will be useful to download a free English application on a tablet or a smartphone by each family member so that the family can then examine its pros and cons and select the best free app for learning English.

Online dictionaries and translation tools are of great linguistic value and educational significance to mastering English as a second language (e.g. searching for a new word, translation of a riddle, tongue twister, proverb, song, poem, rhyme, fairytale, etc.).

It will be a helpful starting point to use English as an operational language. Young learners are often confident users of their parents' mobile phones, tablets, and laptops. Adults should use the said devices to introduce them to second language learning.

Meanwhile, it will be useful for children and parents to join English-speaking online club meetings on Zoom, Google Meet, Skype, or Facebook group communities in order to communicate with peers, native speakers, and other people; in order to overcome psychological difficulties of social interaction in a foreign language and to practise online listening comprehension and speaking skills.

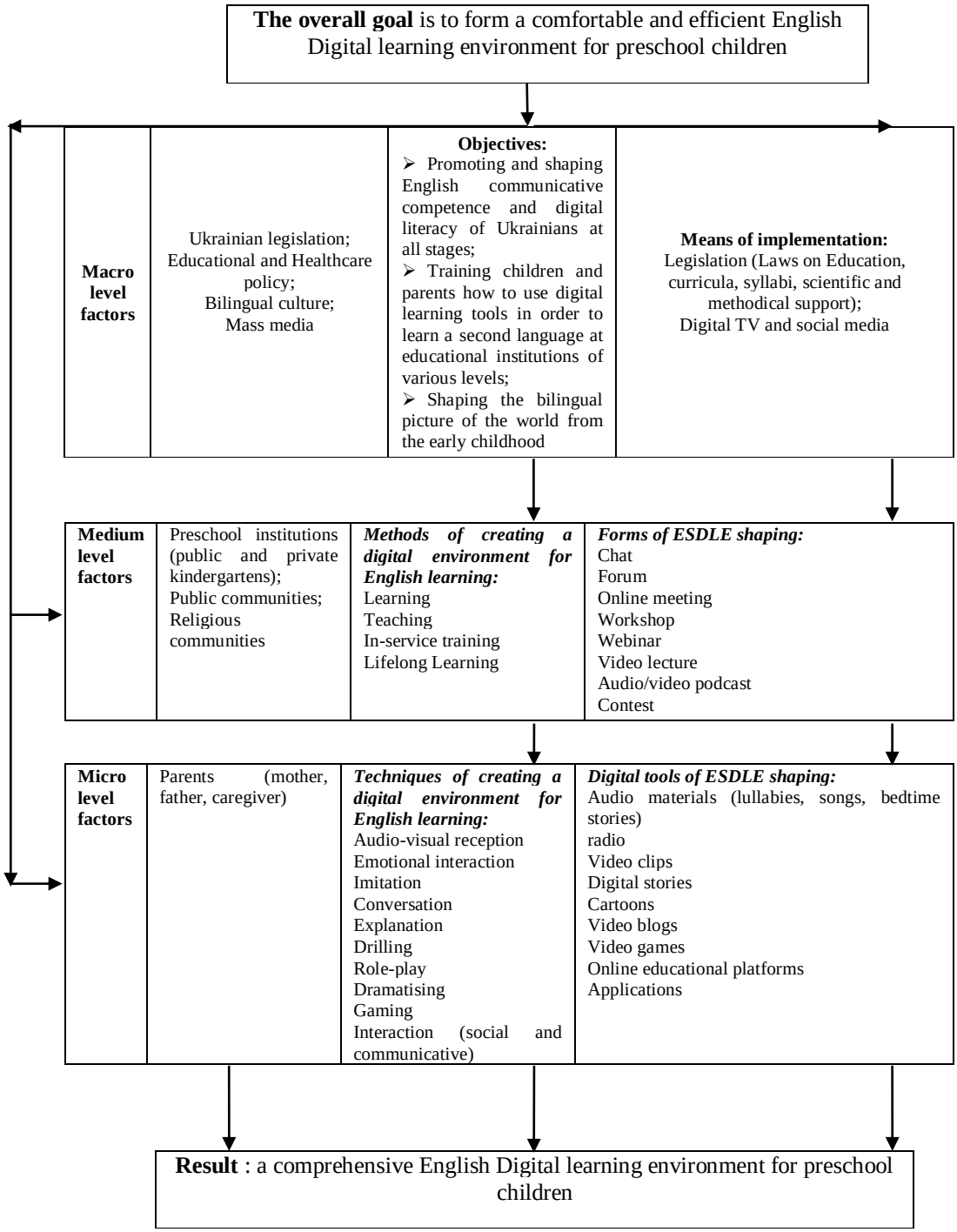
Having considered and analysed a variety of ways of an English-speaking digital learning environment shaping, we would like to suggest a framework (Table 2) that may be used to create such an educational space for preschool learners.

According to the above model, Ukrainian legislation, curricula, syllabi, scientific and methodical support should be used as tools to implement policies stipulated by the legislative branch, education, healthcare, cultural authorities and institutions. This will ensure proper regulation of the process and will allow to enhance it and bring it in line with global educational standards in the light of globalisation and digitalisation.

At present, therefore, intercultural competence is of vital importance in Ukrainian education. This competence depends upon one's command of the English language and one's ability to use the bulk of linguistic and cultural resources in order to meet communication needs or interact with other people—and also to enrich that massive bulk of resources at the same time [2, p. 10]. The intercultural language policy should be promoted nationwide by implementing laws, fostering bilingual consciousness, and shaping one's culture awareness using digital technologies such as digital and social media (e.g. by watching English films, social advertisements, etc.). Guided by the legislation (laws on education, curricula, syllabi, scientific and methodical support), digital TV and social media should promote the suggested policy and shape the English communicative competence and digital literacy of Ukrainians regardless of their age. Both children and their parents should be provided with opportunities for learning a second language using safe digital learning technologies applied in educational institutions of different levels (tiers) which will help them shape a bilingual picture of the world.

Table 2.

Framework of an English-Speaking Digital Learning Environment (ESDLE) aimed at Preschool Children



However, in order to speak English, a person should be able to build up an English linguistic and cultural repertoire. CEFR [2, p. 21] defines this repertoire as all the linguistic and cultural resources available to the speaker. The resources in this repertoire - which CEFR treats as a whole - derive from various sources (family, out-of-school, school etc.). They are acquired informally (often implicitly) or formally (usually explicitly) in the socialisation and schooling process.

Due to that, one's family acts as a basic unit of society, where parents (caregivers) should foster social values in their child. Parents are the paramount agents of socialisation equipping their child with a linguistic and cultural repertoire as they interact with him or her and boosting the child's development as a result of a family strategy accurately applied. These resources can be developed throughout a person's life, depending on how he or she uses different languages in various contexts. Eventually, lifestyles and situations encountered at school and/or in adulthood will undoubtedly enhance that linguistic and cultural repertoire, the groundwork for which had been laid by the child's parents back in childhood [2, p. 21].

With that in mind, in the model here designed, we have suggested that preschool institutions (public and private kindergartens), public voluntary communities, religious communities be engaged in teaching preschool children and adults (parents, caregivers, preschool teachers, instructors, in-service teachers, etc.) to form an English-speaking digital learning environment for children using chats, forums, online meetings, workshops, webinars, video lectures, audio or video podcasts, competitions, etc.

Family is a crucial milestone in the process of shaping a child's personality. Parents (mother, father or caregivers) are the first active models and participants in their child's multifaceted development (physical, emotional, cognitive, intelligent, language, moral, psychological, social, aesthetic, etc.). Upon having conducted a detailed analysis of theories of language acquisition and the European language policy, we should note the immense role of family in learning English as a second language in a digital age. Besides the parents' ability to speak English to their children from early childhood, we have found the benefits of English-speaking digital learning environment shaping. For this purpose, we suggest using a variety of digital learning tools (audio materials (lullabies, songs, bedtime stories), video clips, digital stories, cartoons, video blogs, video games, online educational platforms and applications) interactively.

In order to form the basis of English language proficiency - particularly in order to shape children's audio and visual perceptive skills with a consequent formation of speaking skills, we have outlined useful techniques for learning English with the help of the suggested digital tools: reception, emotional interaction, imitation, conversation, explanation, drilling, role-play, dramatising, gaming, social and communicative interaction.

As a result, the suggested model consisting of different levels (family, educational and legislative institutions) aims at creating a favourable and effective English-speaking digital learning environment for preschoolers' English communicative competence formation.

In order to ascertain the feasibility of the model of an English-speaking digital learning environment, we have provided guidelines for parents of preschoolers and interviewed them.

The first question concerns the identification of parents' attitudes towards mastering English as a second language. The majority of respondents (89%) are highly interested in second language acquisition by their children. Some of them (3%) are against learning English in childhood. 8% of parents are not sure about considering English as the universal language in the modern worldwide community. In general, we observe the importance of English in the educational worldview of adults, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3.

Parents' feedback on the usefulness of learning English for a child's development

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	35	89 %
Not enough	3	8 %
No	1	3%

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The second question involves the reflection of the actual state of English language education in the kindergarten. 87% of parents confirm that English is indeed an integral part

of preschool education. 10% of adults reveal an obvious gap in second language learning. (It should be noted, that their children may also attend private English clubs outside the preschool educational institution.) 3% of respondents consider English to be an optional component of preschool education. The answers are presented in Table 4.

Table 4.

Parents' feedback on the status of learning English by their children

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	34	87 %
Not in the kindergarten	4	10 %
No	1	3%

The third question addresses challenges pertaining to learning English. The most common challenge is financial one, as 41% of parents find English classes to be rather expensive. Among other issues, adults have highlighted methodical challenges (15%), administrative challenges (27%), language difficulties (3%), psychological (4%), pedagogical (7%), and national values (3%). Thus, based on the parents' ideas, it is clear that English preschool education should be offered free of charge and that it should enjoy administrative, pedagogical, psychological, and communicative support to parents and children nationwide. As it can be noted and seen in Table 5, a nation-oriented approach to English is also on the agenda.

Table 5.

Parents' feedback on the difficulties of learning English by preschoolers

Response	Frequency	Percentage
financial	16	41 %
Methodic support	6	15%
administrative	10	27%
pedagogical	3	7%
psychological	2	4%
language	1	3%
national values	1	3%

The next question deals with the issue of establishing the frequency of consumption of digital content in the English language by children. We have ascertained that 41% of preschoolers listen to and watch digital content. 54% of parents are not sure of what the digital habits of their children are. 5% of respondents claim that their children pursue no virtual life whatsoever. Overall, it is obvious that the frequency of digital tools use by children is high. However, those parents who hesitate about their child's everyday digital activity may be surprised if they come to identify basic English language perception skills in their children as a result of involuntary online interaction with technology. Adults' ideas are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Parents' feedback on the frequency of using digital technology by preschoolers

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	16	41 %
Not enough	21	54 %
No	2	5%

The last question is to verify the efficiency of guidelines on how to create an English digital learning environment for children. 69% of parents prove these learning tips to be useful and helpful. Meanwhile, 26% of respondents trace no progress of their children in

learning English with digital tools use. 5% of adults are not supposed to take these guidelines into consideration, as it is shown in Table 7.

Table 7.

Parents' feedback on the efficiency of the suggested learning tips

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	27	69 %
Not enough	10	26 %
No	2	5%

In general, based on the parents' overall prevailing answers in the affirmative, the conducted interview has verified and showcased the feasibility of the suggested guidelines on how to shape a digital English learning environment.

However, numerous scientific works draw our attention to the negative psychological and physiological consequences of the overactive use of digital technologies by children as it might lead to clipping, virtual addiction, and sometimes even mental disabilities [9].

Regarding these negative consequences, Ukrainian scientists [36] have designed the principles of education in a digital era, which should be considered and applied by parents as well. It is highly recommended to follow such principles:

1) the principle of confidence and security for data preservation, actions control, information permission and restriction by parents;

2) the principle of individualisation aims at building individual educational strategies and paths, in particular, individual forms of presentation and communication over social media;

3) the principle of accessibility (digital space should be open, easy-to-use, cutting-edge and constantly developing);

4) the principle of accuracy means the use of relevant digital methods and technologies according to the educational objectives;

5) the principle of development aims at moral personal aspects of character-building, improving and developing the child's creative skills using digital tools of the new era;

6) the principle of flexibility helps to use the digital content according to the individual, age, special needs and interests of each child, considering his or her likes, objectives, time, place, etc.

7) the principle of innovativeness provides the opportunity to use modern interactive, remote learning forms, technologies and methods and ensures the educational benefits from the digital space;

8) the principle of integrity promotes learning a variety of phenomena from the point of view of different sciences [36, p. 1-11].

4. CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Modern worldwide trends in globalisation, digitalisation, universality, plurality, interculturality and mobility have evoked a scientific interest in the study of the issue of an English-speaking digital learning environment shaping for children of preschool age.

The increasing role of English is obvious nowadays, as it changes the style of interpersonal, intercultural communication and interaction in the digital age. Safe use of digital technologies facilitates the relationship, daily routine, well-being, education and entertainment of a modern family anytime, anyplace. Scientific and technological progress not only helps tackle the intelligence challenges of humans (e.g. using AI), but also assists in

resolving intercultural communicative issues that can be solved and enhanced with the aid of digital learning tools.

Linguodidactics has been used as a background to analyse learning English as a second language by preschool children with its culture, juxtaposed with mastering their mother tongue and embracing their native culture, highlighting the impact of such bilingual education on their personal multifaceted development.

A detailed analysis of theories of language acquisition proves the sociocultural theory to be the most accurate and appropriate in the context of the study. Accordingly, the paper has emphasised the core role of parents' Scaffolding and Zone of Proximal Development for mastering a second language through discussing, working in groups, negotiating, and showcasing learning strategies.

Parents (mother, father, or caregivers) are considered the first agents of the child's socialisation. By providing positive behaviour and speech patterns, they are shaping a child's personality on the basis of their interaction aimed at moral, spiritual, emotional, communicative, intelligent, and physical development. Parents may play a significant role in learning English at a young age and building a positive attitude towards English as a second language. Communicative interaction between adults and a child is a milestone in human shaping and mother tongue acquisition, as well as learning a second language.

One of the benefits of second language acquisition in childhood is the parent's ability to speak English to a child beginning with an early age and equip him or her with the corresponding linguistic and cultural repertoire. However, parents' insufficient English language proficiency may be offset artificially by resorting to English-speaking digital learning environment shaping which is defined as a systematic unity of English–speaking linguistic and cultural repertoire in a digital format supported legislatively, scientifically, and methodically, which is managed and overseen by parents, teachers, volunteers with digital learning tools (apps, online educational platforms, computer software, social (digital) media) use. To that end, we have highlighted a variety of resources that can be used by parents, including audio materials (lullabies, songs, bedtime stories, radio programs), video clips, digital stories, cartoons, video blogs, video games, online educational platforms, and applications providing opportunities for learning English.

A thorough review and analysis of cutting-edge audio and video materials for preschoolers involves their authenticity, didactic value, preschool learners' age, interests and language proficiency level.

A didactic comparison of English vlogs provides the possibility to determine their educational significance for children's multifaceted development and the English language communicative competence shaping, including a number of video-based activities in a real-life situation.

Vlogs and cartoons as effective audiovisual tools should be used at the pre-watching, while-watching and after-watching stages in order to form preschool learners' audiovisual comprehension and communicative skills. Plenty of exciting interactive methods and game techniques (e.g. playful experimentation, role-playing, acting out, dramatising, storytelling) based on highlighted video materials for preschoolers are also suggested.

The list of English educational online platforms with games and applications has been examined in order to pinpoint the educational potential of digital learning tools for preschoolers.

Within a family, the following techniques of learning English through digital media may be used: audio-visual reception, emotional interaction, imitation, conversation, explanation, drilling, role-play, dramatising, gaming, and parents' social and communicative interaction with a child.

The suggested guidelines have been used to design a framework for shaping an English-speaking digital learning environment. Considering factors impacting kids at different levels (family, preschool educational institutions, state etc), the suggested model aims at providing preschoolers with a beneficial and efficient digital learning environment which would facilitate the shaping of their communicative competence in the English language. It calls for collaboration and consolidation of efforts put in by family, out-of-preschool communities, kindergartens, state and local authorities aimed at providing opportunities for a free-of-charge shaping of communicative competence in the English language, supported by digital learning tools.

The Feasibility of the suggested guidelines on how to shape the English digital learning environment for children has been verified on the basis of interviews conducted with parents in the kindergarten.

Creating an English-speaking digital learning environment for a child has a number of benefits, specifically: it helps broaden the child's world view, lifestyle and culture, expand and develop his or her knowledge, interests, likes, and abilities; it widens the audience (number of interlocutors) for emotional, communicative and social interaction; it has a positive impact on the child's intelligence, emotional, cognitive, and communicative development.

Meanwhile, alongside the benefits of an English digital learning environment mentioned above, there are also some restrictions that should be imposed on the scope of use of digital learning tools by preschoolers. The following factors and criteria should be addressed and considered: linguistic (authenticity, level of language proficiency), ergonomic (safety, netiquette, reliability, screen time, length, size and download ability of audio or video, picture and sound quality), educational (age-appropriateness, interests, individual abilities, motivation, educational and intercultural value, multifaceted development objectives, interactivity, variety of cognitive and physical integrated activities).

As far as prospects for further research are concerned, the academic paper suggests that different conditions (pedagogical, ergonomic, psychological, cultural, etc.) of English-speaking digital learning environment functioning should be studied thoroughly and methods of digital competence building of preschool children, parents and in-service teachers should be developed.

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СТВОРЕННЯ АНГЛОМОВНОГО ЦИФРОВОГО ОСВІТНЬОГО СЕРЕДОВИЩА ДЛЯ ДІТЕЙ ДОШКІЛЬНОГО ВІКУ: ЛІНГВОДИДАКТИЧНИЙ АСПЕКТ

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Анотація. Нещодавні трансформації в мовній політиці в Україні привертають увагу громадськості та актуалізують вивчення проблеми створення англомовного цифрового освітнього середовища для дітей дошкільного віку в дослідницьких студіях крізь призму лінгводидактики. У статті висвітлено педагогічні переваги оволодіння англійською мовою як другою мовою дошкільниками на основі співвіднесення її з вивченням рідної мови та культури. Ретельний аналіз теорій засвоєння рідної мови доводить актуальність соціокультурної теорії, на тлі якої окреслено ключову роль батьків (опікунів) як перших педагогів дитини та творців англомовного цифрового освітнього середовища для дітей дошкільного віку. Подано відповідні рекомендації батькам щодо створення англомовного освітнього середовища для дітей та його подальшої підтримки за допомогою цифрових ресурсів. Визначено поняття «англомовне цифрове освітнє середовище для дітей дошкільного віку». Запропоновано застосування цифрових освітніх ресурсів одночасно для міжособистісної та міжкультурної взаємодії батьків і дитини. Уточнено дидактичну цінність аудіо- та відеоматеріалів для формування англомовної комунікативної компетенції дошкільників. Влоги та мультфільми розглядаються як найцікавіші та найдієвіші аудіовізуальні засоби вивчення англійської мови для дітей цього віку. Задля мовленнєвого та всебічного розвитку дітей запропоновано ігрові прийоми роботи з цифровими медіа (застосування міміки, переодягання, драматизація, театралізація, рольова гра). Проаналізовано низку освітніх онлайн-платформ і застосунків для вивчення англійської мови з урахуванням цільової аудиторії, завдань, змісту, лінгвістичної та дидактичної відповідності. На основі аналізу низки цифрових освітніх ресурсів і поданих методичних рекомендацій батькам щодо їх застосування розроблено модель створення англомовного цифрового освітнього середовища для дітей дошкільного віку, що охоплює три рівні (сім'я, освітні заклади, держава). Результати опитування батьків дітей дошкільного віку доводять ефективність запропонованих рекомендацій щодо створення сприятливого англомовного цифрового освітнього середовища на рівні сім'ї.

Ключові слова: англійська мова; цифрове освітнє середовище; діти дошкільного віку; батьки; цифрові освітні ресурси; теорія засвоєння мови.

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