

Developing Children's Speech Through Uzbek Folk Oral Literature in Preschool Education Organizations

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Abstract: The preschool years are the most sensitive period for mastering the mother tongue. Yet in many preschool settings, folklore is used mainly for festivities rather than as a systematic tool for speech development. This study aims to substantiate the theoretical foundations, an age-differentiated methodology, and the pedagogical conditions for developing the speech of preschool children through samples of Uzbek folk oral literature.

The study used theoretical analysis of psychological, linguistic and pedagogical literature, review of national regulatory documents and curricula, pedagogical observation in preschool organizations, and comparative and systemic analysis.

The study identifies the specific speech functions of six folklore genres (lullabies and nursery songs, counting rhymes and game songs, tongue twisters, riddles, proverbs, and folk tales). It proposes age-differentiated content for children aged 3–7, a three-stage lesson structure, a set of effective methods, five criteria with three levels for assessing speech development, and forms of cooperation with families. Five recurring problems in current practice are also described.

Folk oral literature serves as an emotionally engaging and culturally relevant means of developing all components of preschool children's speech: vocabulary, sound culture, grammatical structure and connected speech. It is most effective when integrated systematically into daily routines and lessons and supported by regular diagnostics and family involvement. An experimental design for testing the methodology is outlined.

Keywords: Preschool education; speech development; folk oral literature; folklore; folk tales; riddles; connected speech; vocabulary; speech environment; Uzbekistan.

Introduction: Speech plays a central role in the formation of a child's personality. Through speech, children come to understand the world around them, communicate with adults and peers, and learn to express their thoughts and feelings. The preschool years are the most sensitive period for mastering the mother tongue. During this time, vocabulary grows rapidly, pronunciation takes shape, complex sentence structures are acquired, and the first connected texts appear. Speech difficulties that go unaddressed at this stage may later cause problems in reading, writing and learning in general.

The Republic of Uzbekistan has given considerable

attention to the development of preschool education. The Law "On Preschool Education and Upbringing" (2019) and the state curricula *Ilk Qadam* ("First Step") and *Bolajon* define children's speech development as one of the priority areas of preschool education (Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019; Ministry of Preschool Education, n.d.). At the same time, current conditions call for a fresh look at the means of speech development. Screen media now occupy a growing share of children's lives, live family conversation is declining, and much of the content produced for children is distant from national cultural values. These trends create a need for tools of speech development that are close to the child, emotionally engaging and

culturally relevant.

The oldest and most time-tested of such tools is folk oral literature. Genres such as lullabies, counting rhymes, tongue twisters, riddles, proverbs and folk tales have served child-rearing for centuries. They preserve the pure, vivid and concise vocabulary of the mother tongue. Their rhythm and rhyme make them easy for children to remember and repeat.

Speech development has been widely studied in pedagogy, psychology and linguistics. Vygotsky interpreted speech as an activity that emerges in social interaction and later becomes an internal instrument of thinking. He also emphasized the importance of collaboration with adults and the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978, 1999). Elkonin (2004) linked the development of children's speech to play and activity. Bruner (1983) highlighted the role of repetitive, play-like formats of adult-child interaction that serve as supportive "scaffolding" structures in language acquisition. This idea provides an important theoretical basis for explaining the speech potential of folklore, especially cumulative tales and game songs.

The stages of children's speech and methods for its development were elaborated by Gvozdev (1961), Tikheeva (1981), and Fedorenko et al. (1984). Ushinsky (1864) regarded the mother tongue and folk oral literature as the natural foundation of children's education and noted the particular influence of folk language on the child's mind. These views have deep roots in Uzbek pedagogical thought. The proverbs and quatrains recorded in Mahmud Kashgari's *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* and Abdulla Avloni's ideas on educating children through word and example in *Turkiy Guliston yoxud axloq* ("The Turkic Rose Garden, or Morals") show how highly the educational power of folk language was valued (Kashgari, 1960–1963; Avloni, 1913). The genres of Uzbek folk oral poetry and their poetic features have been described in detail in folklore studies (Imomov et al., 1990).

A review of existing research shows that the educational and aesthetic value of folklore is well documented. However, an age-differentiated system that directs folklore toward developing specific components of speech (vocabulary, sound culture, grammatical structure and connected speech) has not been sufficiently developed. In practice, folklore is

often confined to holidays and moral-education events. It has not become a coherent, goal-oriented system of speech development with measurable outcomes.

The aim of this study is to describe the theoretical foundations of developing preschool children's speech through samples of folk oral literature, to substantiate an age-appropriate methodology, and to identify the pedagogical conditions for its implementation. The study addresses the following objectives:

1. to describe the features of speech development in preschool age;
2. to identify the speech-development potential of folklore genres;
3. to propose content and methods of work for each age group;
4. to define criteria for assessing speech development;
5. to describe forms of cooperation with families.

METHODS

The study follows a theoretical and methodological design. Its first part synthesizes existing knowledge and practice into an age-differentiated methodology. Its second part outlines a pedagogical experiment for testing that methodology.

The following materials were analyzed:

- psychological, psycholinguistic and pedagogical works on children's speech development (Bruner, 1983; Elkonin, 2004; Fedorenko et al., 1984; Gvozdev, 1961; Tikheeva, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978, 1999);
- classical and national sources on the educational role of folk language (Avloni, 1913; Kashgari, 1960–1963; Ushinsky, 1864);
- folklore studies describing the genres of Uzbek folk oral poetry (Imomov et al., 1990);
- national regulatory documents and the state preschool curricula *Ilk Qadam* and *Bolajon*;
- samples of Uzbek folklore suitable for preschool children: lullabies and nursery songs (*alla*, *erkalash qo'shiqlari*), counting rhymes, *lapar* and game songs, tongue twisters, riddles, proverbs and sayings, and folk tales.

The study combined five methods:

1. Theoretical analysis of the literature to identify

the age-related features of speech development and the components of speech.

2. Document analysis of national legislation and state curricula to determine the place of speech development and folklore in preschool education content.

3. Pedagogical observation of the work of preschool educational organizations to identify how folklore is currently used in speech development. [Authors should specify here the number of organizations and groups observed, the period of observation, and the observation instrument used.]

4. Comparative analysis of folklore genres in terms of their linguistic features (rhythm, rhyme, repetition, imagery, composition) and their potential for developing each component of speech.

5. Systemic approach to integrate the findings into a coherent methodology covering principles, age-differentiated content, methods, lesson structure, assessment criteria and pedagogical conditions.

To test the effectiveness of the proposed methodology, a pedagogical experiment with experimental and control groups is planned in three stages:

- Ascertaining stage: the baseline level of children's speech development is determined using the criteria presented in Table 3.
- Formative stage: experimental groups work according to the folklore-based methodology, and control groups follow the standard curriculum.
- Control stage: the results of both groups are compared and analyzed statistically.

Assessment is based on diagnostic tasks: observation, conversation, retelling a tale, describing an object in the form of a riddle, and composing a story from a picture. [Authors should specify here the sample size, age groups, duration of the formative stage, and the statistical tests to be used, for example the Mann–Whitney U test or the χ^2 test for comparing level distributions.]

RESULTS

The analysis showed that the preschool period (ages 3–7) is marked by qualitative changes in speech. Three-year-olds rely mainly on situational speech. They talk about what they see and directly perceive, their sentences are short, and grammatical links are not yet

fully formed. At ages four to five, vocabulary expands considerably. Children begin to ask questions and to express cause and effect in words, and their sentences become more complex. At ages six to seven, contextual speech begins to form: a mode of expression that conveys meaning fully within the text, independent of the immediate situation. Children become able to compose stories, retell texts and justify their opinions.

Speech development covers four interrelated areas: vocabulary, sound culture of speech, grammatically correct speech, and connected speech (dialogic and monologic). These areas are components of a single process and are best developed in an integrated way. Children's speech develops most actively when they feel a need to communicate, are interested and feel emotionally comfortable. Activities based on play, performance and collaboration are therefore preferable to compulsory drills.

Pedagogical observation revealed five recurring problems in the use of folklore in preschool organizations:

1. Age mismatch. Texts are often selected without regard to age. Younger children receive long, complex texts, while older children receive texts that are too simple for their speech abilities.
2. Mechanical memorization. Texts are memorized without explanation of their meaning. Children repeat the words but do not understand them and do not use them in their own speech.
3. Limited contexts of use. Folklore is used mainly in holidays and entertainment events and is not integrated into daily pedagogical work or speech development lessons.
4. Insufficient teacher preparation. Some educators lack the methodological training to perform folklore expressively and to link it to specific speech objectives.
5. No systematic monitoring. Speech development outcomes are not tracked systematically, which makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of folklore-based activities.

Four features explain the advantage of folk oral literature for speech development. First, folklore texts are rich in rhythm, rhyme, repetition and sound harmony, which make them easier to remember and

pronounce. Second, they preserve the purest, most vivid and concise vocabulary of the mother tongue. Third, they are performed together with emotional interaction, play and movement between adult and

child. Fourth, they transmit national values, moral norms and early ideas about the world through language. The specific functions of each genre are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Functions of folklore genres in speech development

Folklore genre	Main function in speech development
Lullabies and nursery (endearment) songs	Listening culture; sensing intonation and the melody of speech; emotional communication
Counting rhymes, <i>lapar</i> and game songs	Sound pronunciation; tempo and rhythm of speech; coordination of words and movement
Tongue twisters	Diction; training of the articulatory apparatus; correct pronunciation of difficult sounds
Riddles	Vocabulary; understanding figurative meaning; logical thinking; skills of definition
Proverbs and sayings	Concise and precise expression; understanding shades of word meaning; acquiring moral concepts
Folk tales	Connected speech; retelling; dialogic speech; coherent narration following a plot

Lullabies and nursery songs introduce the child to the melody of the mother tongue from infancy. Sound repetitions, drawn-out and soft intonation, and affectionate forms of address prepare the child emotionally for verbal interaction. Counting rhymes and game songs activate the articulatory apparatus through movement and teach control of tempo and breathing. Their question-and-answer structure encourages children to communicate.

Tongue twisters serve as game-like exercises for correcting pronunciation. The repetition of identical or similar sounds directs the child's attention to the sound side of speech and develops phonemic hearing. Work starts slowly and clearly and then gradually speeds up, with game elements such as "who can say it most clearly". The emphasis is on accuracy, not speed.

Riddles teach children to choose words deliberately, compare features of objects and understand figurative meaning. In solving a riddle, the child identifies an object from its description, that is, performs analysis and synthesis through speech. Composing riddles later develops creative speech. Proverbs and sayings bring concise, meaningful expressions into the child's vocabulary and teach their use in appropriate situations, provided that their meaning is explained through examples the child can understand.

Folk tales are the most effective source of connected speech. Their clear composition (opening, development, climax and ending) gives the child a ready model for building a narrative. In cumulative (chain) tales, the recurring phrases help children memorize the text, repeat the characters' lines and acquire dialogic speech. Tales also introduce new words, epithets, similes and grammatical forms. For this reason, tales should not only be read aloud but also performed jointly, analyzed through questions, retold and dramatized.

The methodology rests on six didactic principles: national and educational orientation; correspondence to the child's age and individual characteristics; integration with play and activity; consistency and systematicity; integrated development of all components of speech; and stimulation of the child's speech activity. Selected texts should have content the child can understand, simple and fluent language, and a positive educational idea. Dialectal and archaic words should be explained.

The content of work is differentiated by age (Table 2). In the younger group, the focus is on listening, repetition and clear pronunciation. In the middle group, it shifts to description and sentence building; in the senior group, to retelling and dialogue; and in the

school-preparatory group, to independent storytelling and reasoning.

Table 2. Folklore material and speech objectives by age group

Age group	Recommended folklore material	Main speech objective
3–4 years	Nursery songs, short counting rhymes, game songs, short tales	Listening and repeating; answering simple questions; clear pronunciation of sounds
4–5 years	Simple riddles, cumulative tales, short proverbs, tongue twisters	Describing objects; building sentences; repeating characters' lines
5–6 years	Animal tales, riddles, proverbs and sayings, <i>lapar</i>	Retelling tales; building dialogues; understanding shades of word meaning
6–7 years	Magic and everyday tales, complex tongue twisters, proverbs, elements of <i>aytishuv</i> (verbal contest)	Independent storytelling; justifying opinions; speech readiness for school

The most effective methods identified were: expressive performance by the educator as a model; joint repetition of the text with rhythm and movement; question-and-answer work on meaning; retelling with the help of mnemonic tables and picture diagrams; continuing a tale or inventing a new ending; role reading and dramatization; teaching children to compose riddles; and word games. Mnemonic techniques are especially valuable for memorization and coherent narration, and dramatization for dialogic speech and expressiveness. In every method, the child is treated as an active speaker rather than a passive listener.

A folklore-based speech lesson can follow three stages:

- 1. Preparatory stage.** Children's attention is drawn to the topic through a riddle, a puppet or picture, or a counting rhyme or game song.
- 2. Main stage.** The educator performs a tale or another folklore sample expressively, asks questions about its content, explains new words, repeats the text with the children and organizes retelling with a mnemonic table.
- 3. Consolidation stage.** Children act out the text in roles, invent a new ending, or address a character in sentences of their own.

Example 1 (middle group, 4–5 years). A lesson based on the cumulative tale *Sholg'om* ("The Turnip"). In the preparatory stage, the educator asks riddles about

vegetables. In the main stage, the tale is performed with puppets or pictures; children say the characters' recurring words together and answer questions such as "Who called whom?". In the consolidation stage, children play the characters, restore the sequence of events and retell the tale from a picture diagram. One lesson thus targets vocabulary (names of vegetables, action verbs), grammar (case and plural forms) and connected speech (sequential narration) at the same time.

Example 2 (senior group, 5–6 years). A lesson titled "A Journey of Riddles" is built around a travel storyline: at each "stop", children solve a riddle, list the object's features, state their guesses and justify the answer. Children then exchange familiar riddles in pairs and, with the educator's help, compose simple riddles of their own based on an object's features. The best riddles are recorded with drawings in the group's "Book of Riddles". This work develops vocabulary, definition skills, logical thinking and creative speech together.

Genre-specific recommendations were also formulated. Lullabies are performed in a calm, affectionate tone, most naturally before the afternoon nap. Tongue twisters are first performed slowly by the educator, then repeated in chorus, in small groups and individually; difficult sounds are practiced through game situations such as "blow the little wind". With riddles, the educator does not give the answer but lets the child list features, compare and guess, and then

asks "Why did you think so?". Proverbs are first explained through a life situation or a tale episode and only then used by the children in a suitable context. Combining several genres around one theme (for example, a riddle, a counting rhyme and a short tale on the theme "Autumn") holds children's attention and develops different aspects of speech together.

The educator acts as organizer, model and partner. The educator listens without hurrying the child, corrects errors by repeating the correct form in their own

speech rather than criticizing, and involves every child, including shy and quiet children. Small-group work, riddle exchange in pairs and the "tale chain" (each child continues the story in turn) support this aim.

Five criteria with three levels were defined for monitoring speech development (Table 3). Assessment uses observation, conversation, a retelling task, describing an object as a riddle, and composing a story from a picture.

Table 3. Criteria and level descriptors of speech development

Criterion	High level	Medium level	Low level
Vocabulary	Varied active vocabulary; uses adjectives and verbs appropriately	Adequate vocabulary; sometimes struggles to choose words	Limited vocabulary; needs adult help to choose words
Sound culture	Pronounces all sounds clearly; controls tempo	Pronounces some sounds unclearly	Distorts several sounds
Grammatical structure	Builds sentences correctly; uses suffixes appropriately	Occasional errors in case and possessive forms	Short sentences; many grammatical errors
Connected speech	Retells a tale coherently; composes stories independently	Needs prompting when retelling	Limited to separate sentences
Expressiveness and initiative	Uses intonation appropriately; initiates communication	Moderate expressiveness; initiative depends on the situation	Low speech activity; avoids communication

Observation results are recorded on each child's speech development map and serve as a basis for individualizing work. Children with speech difficulties should be identified early and referred to a speech therapist. Folklore serves as a complementary tool for these children and does not replace speech therapy.

Five pedagogical conditions were identified as necessary for realizing the speech potential of folklore:

1. Educator competence. Educators should know folklore material and be able to use it methodically. Since the educator's own speech is a model for children, its accuracy, fluency and expressiveness are key factors. The topic of folklore-based speech development should be included in in-service training courses and seminars.

2. A rich speech environment in the group: a

national book corner, puppets of tale characters, picture cards, mnemonic tables and audio recordings.

3. Regular use across the daily routine, for example a counting rhyme at morning reception, a game song during outdoor walks, and a lullaby or tale before naptime.

4. Moderate use of digital resources. Professional audio recordings of lullabies and tales can complement, but should not replace, the educator's live performance.

5. Respect for home languages in multilingual groups, with Uzbek folklore introduced gradually.

Cooperation with families is an integral part of speech development. Effective forms include consultations for parents on lullabies and tales in the family, open lessons, home tasks in which families collect riddles and

proverbs, and inviting grandparents to group activities. Parents are advised to spend at least a few minutes every day in live conversation with their child, telling tales and retelling them together.

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that the value of folk oral literature for speech development lies not in any single genre but in the complementary functions of the genres as a system. Lullabies and counting rhymes mainly support listening and rhythm, tongue twisters support pronunciation, riddles and proverbs support vocabulary and thinking, and tales support connected speech. When the genres are combined and matched to age, folklore can address all four components of speech development rather than serving only an aesthetic or festive purpose.

These findings are consistent with the sociocultural view of language development. Vygotsky (1978) argued that higher mental functions, including speech, first appear in interaction with adults and are later internalized. Folklore performances such as game songs and the joint telling of cumulative tales are exactly this kind of shared activity. In Bruner's (1983) terms, they act as predictable, repeated formats in which the adult provides scaffolding that is gradually withdrawn as the child takes over. The three-stage lesson structure and the progression from repetition (ages 3–4) to independent storytelling (ages 6–7) reflect this principle of gradual transfer of responsibility to the child.

The age-differentiated content also agrees with classical descriptions of the transition from situational to contextual speech (Elkonin, 2004; Gvozdev, 1961). Short, rhythmic texts suit the situational speech of younger children, while tales with a clear compositional structure provide a model for the contextual, monologic speech that emerges at ages six to seven.

A distinctive feature of folklore is that it combines speech development with moral and cultural education. Tales present concepts such as good and evil, diligence and laziness, honesty and deceit in vivid form. When children discuss the characters' actions with questions such as "Why did the hero do that?" or "What would you have done?", they practise stating opinions, evaluating and giving reasons. Speech thus becomes not only a matter of acquiring words but a

means of thinking and of understanding values. This continuity with Uzbek pedagogical tradition (Avloni, 1913; Kashgari, 1960–1963) and with Ushinsky's (1864) view of the mother tongue as the basis of education gives folklore particular cultural relevance in an environment increasingly dominated by globalized screen content.

Folklore-based speech development fits well with current educational approaches. From a competence-based perspective, children's competences in communication, self-expression and collaboration develop naturally through folklore games and dramatizations. An integrated approach links speech work with other activities: drawing tale characters and talking about them in art activities, singing lullabies and game songs in music lessons, using counting rhymes in outdoor games, and drawing on riddles and proverbs when exploring the environment. Puppet theatre and table theatre increase speech activity and help shy children speak more freely through a character's voice.

In inclusive settings, the rhythm and repetition of folklore make it a convenient means of engaging children with speech difficulties, provided that specialists are involved. As noted in Section 3.6, folklore complements but does not replace speech therapy.

This study has several limitations. First, it is primarily theoretical and methodological; the effectiveness of the proposed methodology has not yet been confirmed by quantitative experimental data [to be revised once the results in Section 3.8 are added]. Second, the observation of current practice was conducted in a limited number of preschool organizations in one region, which restricts the generalizability of the identified problems. Third, the assessment criteria rely on qualitative level descriptors; their reliability (for example, inter-rater agreement) should be tested. Future research should verify the methodology through a controlled pedagogical experiment, examine its effects on children from multilingual families, and explore its integration with digital resources.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that folk oral literature is an educationally rich, emotionally engaging and culturally relevant means of developing preschool children's speech. Folklore genres influence different

components of speech: lullabies and counting rhymes develop listening and rhythm, tongue twisters develop pronunciation, riddles and proverbs develop vocabulary and thinking, and tales develop connected speech. High pedagogical effectiveness can be expected when age-differentiated content, active methods, a three-stage lesson structure, clear assessment criteria and cooperation with families are combined.

The practical recommendations are as follows:

1. select folklore material systematically and in line with children's age;
2. prepare a methodological guide and a collection of texts for educators;
3. create a national speech environment in preschool groups;
4. diagnose children's speech development regularly;
5. involve parents actively in the process.

Further research should test the effectiveness of the folklore-based speech development model through a pedagogical experiment and explore ways to integrate it with digital resources.

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