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THE MONTESSORI ENVIRONMENT AS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR SUPPORTING SPEECH DEVELOPMENT IN PRESCHOOLERS

The article examines the pedagogical potential of the Montessori educational environment as an effective means of supporting and correcting speech development in senior preschool children within early childhood education institutions. The study is grounded in the theoretical principles of Maria Montessori's pedagogical system, which emphasizes the importance of a specially organized developmental environment that enables children to realize their individual abilities and developmental needs through independent activity.

The Montessori environment promotes cognitive, sensory, and communicative development through purposeful interaction with specially designed didactic materials. Independent play and manipulative activities within such an environment stimulate the child's sensory sphere and contribute to the development of essential mental processes that underlie higher cognitive operations, including comparison, classification, differentiation, and generalization. The formation of sensory standards during these activities creates a foundation for the development of thinking processes and speech skills in preschool children.

In accordance with Montessori methodology, the educational environment is organized into several functional areas corresponding to key domains of child development. These areas include the practical life zone, which supports the development of fine motor skills, coordination, and self-care abilities; the sensory development zone, aimed at refining sensory perception and encouraging its verbalization; the "cosmic education" zone, which introduces children to elements of nature, culture, and history; the language zone, focused on the development of speech

competence and preparation for reading and writing; the mathematics zone, which introduces children to basic mathematical concepts; and the artistic creativity zone, which fosters creative expression and the development of fine motor skills. Such zoning effectively satisfies children's need for play and physical activity while simultaneously contributing to the development of spatial orientation, attention, memory, and thinking.

An essential condition for the effective functioning of the Montessori environment is the accessibility and systematic organization of didactic materials. Educational materials are placed on open shelves, trays, or containers at a height accessible to children, allowing them to independently select and use them during activities. Once a particular skill has been mastered, the material is gradually replaced with more complex tasks in order to support further development. The environment also includes everyday objects used to develop practical self-care skills.

The Montessori educational environment can be effectively utilized by preschool educators during both individual and group play-based activities aimed at supporting children with general speech underdevelopment. Such activities facilitate sound differentiation and automatization, vocabulary expansion, the formation of coherent speech, and the activation of cognitive processes, including auditory and visual perception. Although the primary corrective work is carried out by speech therapists, educators perform an important supportive role and may involve parents in addressing children's speech development needs.

The findings indicate that the organization and implementation of a Montessori educational environment in preschool institutions create favorable pedagogical conditions for supporting and correcting children's speech development. In contemporary conditions, it is also advisable to organize such environments in safe spaces or shelters in order to ensure the continuity of educational and developmental support. Future research may focus on the theoretical and methodological substantiation of involving parents of children with speech disorders in the application of Montessori-based practices in the home environment.