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## **DEVELOPMENT OF PHONETIC COMPETENCE IN CHILDREN OF LOWER-KINDERGARTEN AGE THROUGH DIDACTIC GAMES AND EXERCISES**

Speech is the primary means of communication, cognition, and socialization of a child. It is through speech that a child enters the world of human relationships and acquires cultural and social norms. One of the key components of speech development is phonetic competence, which determines the quality of sound pronunciation, clarity of speech, and the level of development of phonemic processes. For younger preschool children (aged 3–4), this competence is especially important, as this is the period when the articulatory apparatus is actively developing, auditory analyzers are improving, and speech breathing and voice are being formed [1].

Phonetic competence involves the acquisition of the following skills and abilities:

- correct speech breathing and voice strength;
- developed articulatory motor coordination;
- accurate and clear pronunciation of native language sounds;
- development of phonemic hearing and the ability to distinguish sounds by ear;
- ability to perform sound analysis and synthesis;
- mastery of intonation means of speech [3; 4].

Underdevelopment of these components in children may manifest in unclear pronunciation, omission or substitution of sounds, insufficient speech expressiveness, and difficulties in literacy acquisition in the future. Therefore, pedagogical work should be early, purposeful, and systematic.

In preschool education, play is the leading activity; therefore, the development of phonetic competence should mainly occur in a game (play-based) format. Didactic games enhance interest in speech, create positive emotions, activate attention, and reduce tension, which is especially important when working with young children.

### Main groups of didactic games and exercises:

1. *Articulatory exercises and speech gymnastics.* Aimed at strengthening the muscles of the lips, tongue, and jaw. Examples: “Clock,” “Pancakes,” “Bridge,” “Mushroom,” “Horse.” They help prepare the articulatory apparatus for correct sound production.

2. *Breathing and voice exercises.* The goal is to develop steady speech exhalation and voice strength. Examples: “Blow on a Dandelion,” “Little Train,” “Strong and Weak Wind.”

3. *Games for the development of phonemic hearing.* Children learn to distinguish sounds by ear and recognize them in words. Examples: “What Sounds?”, “Whose Voice Is It?”, “Find the Same Sound.”

4. *Games and exercises for speech expressiveness.* Help master intonation, tempo, and stress. Examples: “Echo,” “Speak Like a Fairy-Tale Character,” “Whisper and Speak Loudly.”

5. Role-playing speech games. Provide opportunities to use speech in natural, emotionally rich situations. Examples: “At the Zoo,” “Cafeteria,” “Hospital” [2].

In such games, the child not only practices sound but also actively speaks, which helps consolidate results.

Conditions for effective development of phonetic competence:

- systematic and consistent practice;
- age-appropriate selection of games;
- individual approach to each child;
- combination of group and individual forms of work;
- active involvement of parents in practicing exercises at home;
- a supportive and emotionally positive environment [5; 6].

Thus, didactic games are not only a form of entertainment but also an important pedagogical tool that ensures natural, motivated, and effective development of phonetic competence. Their effectiveness is reflected in improved clarity and expressiveness of speech, development of auditory attention, enrichment of the emotional and intonational aspects of speech, and the formation of a positive attitude toward communication.

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