



Some methods to stimulate interest in exploring the plant world for 5-6 year old children in preschool

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Abstract

Stimulating children's interest in exploring the plant world is a means to communicate and familiarize them with the surrounding environment, to interact and express their desires, forming and understanding the phenomena around them, educating them to behave appropriately towards nature and society. Through these methods, teachers develop children's skills in observation, critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, and abstraction. Exploring the plant world for preschool children satisfies their curiosity and desire for knowledge about the phenomena of the surrounding world, while also contributing to the development of their sensory sensitivity and abilities in memory, imagination, comparison, synthesis, and classification... Helping children recognize the relationship between natural phenomena and the familiar social environment. This fosters in children a love for nature, their country, and people, and helps expand their knowledge base.

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1. Introduction

Understanding the world around them is an essential need for children, so in every situation, children are often actively engaged to satisfy that need. One of the key factors driving children's activeness is interest. Interest creates a desire in children to approach and delve deeper into exploration and understanding. It serves to guide and regulate psychological processes in children such as perception, reasoning, imagination, abstraction, while also helping them actively engage in activities in a suitable direction. Moreover, interest makes children enthusiastic, voluntary, resilient, and determined in activities to overcome challenges, enabling them to grasp life experiences, insights into the surrounding world deeply and comprehensively. It can be said that all efforts of educators will be in vain if children are indifferent and lack interest in activities.

Children's activities have the characteristic of being easily attracted, becoming bored, and struggling to maintain interest, especially when exploring the plant world. Plants are very familiar and adorable like "friends" around them, but to children, they often seem "static", uninteresting, and lacking vitality. They don't make sounds, nor do they exhibit playful behaviors like the animal world, making it difficult to attract attention, often diminishing interest, and hindering children's exploration.

Currently, following the trend of modern education, early childhood education is being innovated towards integrated themes, emphasizing the child's role as the subject through educational activities, and "the plant world" is one of the major themes and considered a means of educating children. Because through the formation of symbols about various types of plants, flowers, fruits... children will develop intelligence, language, physical abilities... Therefore, stimulating interest in exploring the plant world for 5-6 year old children in preschool is an important and urgent issue in the current stage.

2. Research Content

2.1 Some Concepts

2.1.1. Interest and Interest of 5-6 Year Old Children

According to the perspective of A.G. Kovaliov: "Interest in learning is the special selective attitude of the subject towards the object of learning activities, due to its emotional appeal and practical significance in the individual's life" [1, p.21].

Pham Minh Hac - Le Khanh - Tran Trong Thuy argue: "When we are interested in something, it is always conscious to us, we understand its significance in our lives. Moreover, a special feeling towards it arises within us, therefore interest attracts us to the object, creating a desire to delve deeper into it" [2, p.21].

Within the scope of this topic, the concept of interest is consistent with the author Nguyen Quang Uan, who states: "Interest is the special attitude of an individual towards an object, which is both meaningful to life and capable of bringing pleasure to the individual during the activity. This concept both highlights the essence of interest and links it to individual activities" [3].

Thus, interest is the individual's attitude towards certain objects or phenomena. Interest is an expression of the cognitive tendency of individuals towards objective reality, showing human fondness for certain objects or phenomena. An object or phenomenon can only become the object of interest when it satisfies the following two conditions: It must be meaningful to the individual's life. To develop interest, the subject must perceive the significance of the object or phenomenon in their life; When perceived and realized, the "object or phenomenon" must be capable of bringing pleasure to the subject.

2.1.2. Exploring the Plant World Activities in Preschools

Exploring the plant world activities for preschool children are understood and defined from various perspectives, such as:

In the book "Exploring Science Activities for Preschool Children" [4, p.45], exploring the plant world is described as the process where children actively engage in exploring and understanding the natural world. It involves observing, comparing, classifying, experimenting, predicting, reasoning, discussing, problem-solving, and decision-making.

Author Hoang Thi Oanh states: "Exploring the plant world is the process where children actively engage in exploring and understanding the natural world. It involves observing, comparing, classifying, experimenting, predicting, reasoning, discussing, problem-solving, and decision-making..." [5].

Based on the definitions of science and exploration above, the concept of "exploring the plant world" for young children, according to Hoang Thi Oanh, is: "Exploring the plant world is the cognitive activity of individuals aimed at discovering knowledge about the plant world. It is finding, discovering positive knowledge hidden from the surrounding world. Exploring the plant world is a cognitive activity aimed at acquiring positive knowledge through the process of exploration, discovery, and exploration of the surrounding world" [5].

Plants are organisms capable of synthesizing nutrients from simple inorganic compounds and building complex molecules through the process of photosynthesis, which occurs in the chloroplasts of plants. Plants lack the ability to move freely except for some microscopic plants capable of limited movement. Plants also differ from animals in their

slow response to stimuli, with reactions often occurring on a daily basis and only in cases of prolonged stimulation.

2.1.3. Stimulating Interest in Exploring the Plant World for 5-6 Year Old Children

Stimulating interest in exploring the plant world for 5-6 year old children plays a crucial role in creating positive attention and memory retention regarding the plant world. Alongside autonomy, interest fosters positive cognitive development, enabling children to achieve high results and igniting their creative potential. What children find interesting helps them deeply remember and easily recall when needed. The state of interest provides a favorable environment for children's imaginative creativity.

It can be defined as follows: Stimulating interest is when teachers use methods, activities, and behaviors to influence cognition, will, and emotions to foster positive liking in children, helping them become more enthusiastic and eager towards a particular field or aspect. Stimulating interest can take various forms, thereby helping children increase their enthusiasm, love for scientific exploration, create a good impression, and develop a desire to explore the plant world.

2.1.4. Methods to Stimulate Interest in Exploring the Plant World for 5-6 Year Old Children

Method: A method is the pathway, the way of doing something. The teacher's method is the directed approach of the teacher aimed at guiding children's activities towards specific educational tasks and situations.

With this understanding, this topic defines methods to stimulate interest in exploring the plant world for 5-6 year old children as the organized approach to conducting activities derived from the plant world to create attention, promote children's positive engagement in the learning process, enhance knowledge, and understanding of the plant world, thereby enabling children to apply that understanding to their lives.

Specific methods that preschool teachers need to implement to organize activities for exploring the plant world for 5-6 year old children include: [6, p.17]

- Creating a rich and attractive scientific activity environment for children with various tools, toys, different plants, flowers, fruits, etc.
- Allowing children to explore, observe, consider, and speculate about the objects and phenomena around them by using all senses appropriately and through play activities.
- Allowing time for children to explore, experience, and share their opinions.
- Using open-ended questions to help children develop their own thinking.
- Allowing children to engage in activities and perform tasks for themselves as these tasks can be valuable lessons and experiences for children about the plant world.

For preschoolers, teachers play a vital role in stimulating the desire to explore the surrounding world and the desire to acquire knowledge. Children of this age not only have a need for learning but also have the ability to learn. Teachers not only help children expand their experiences to develop cognition but also need to help children understand that learning is an exciting process, providing opportunities for children to explore the plant world, objects, and share the joy

and satisfaction of exploration to stimulate children's curiosity and interest in exploring the plant world.

2.2. Current Situation of Using Methods to Stimulate Interest in Exploring the Plant World for 5-6 Year Old Children in Preschools

2.2.1 Advantages

Firstly, from a social perspective, Vietnam is an agricultural country where agriculture is closely intertwined with society's life. Despite the current trend of industrialization, Vietnamese people still have a strong connection with farming, possessing certain knowledge about familiar plant species. In their daily activities, children are inevitably exposed to or have some understanding of plants, which naturally sparks curiosity and interest in the surrounding plant species.

Secondly, Classroom teachers typically have minimum professional qualifications of Intermediate, College and continue to study at University. They are passionate about their profession and dedicated to children, continuously enhancing their professional competence through formal training according to the preschool education curriculum provided by the Ministry of Education and Training. They also have the ability to creatively apply their skills and professional experience in teaching, helping to motivate and create interest for children in the process of "play-based learning".

Thirdly, with the development of society, advanced technologies play a significant role in education in general and preschool education in particular. The advent of the Internet has addressed many issues related to visual teaching methods by providing unlimited resources such as music, images, short films, and documents. Proficient use of the Internet and electronic devices such as TVs, projectors, and speakers makes learning more enjoyable for children during class hours, while also enabling teachers to fully utilize their creativity to enhance the quality of classroom activities.

2.2.2. Challenges

In reality, there are certain challenges in using methods to stimulate interest in exploring the plant world for 5-6 year old children in preschools.

Firstly, environmental factors pose difficulties. Exploring the plant world involves dynamic activities that depend on weather conditions. When favorable weather conditions occur, all teachers in the school want to provide opportunities for children to play outdoors. This leads to multiple classes participating simultaneously. Selecting a suitable outdoor exploration area that is cool, shaded, safe for children, and conducive to stimulating their interest is not easy. With the increasing demand for enrollment in preschools, some schools have built more classrooms, resulting in a reduction of outdoor play areas. The lack of space for activities leads to situations where classes have to wait for their turn, somewhat affecting the quality of education.

Secondly, there are challenges related to the school's physical facilities. According to statistics, the average number of preschool students in public schools in Tuyen Quang province is about 57 per class. With such a large number of students, it significantly affects the quality of teachers' management and organization of activities. Additionally, based on surveys, the shortage of teaching aids is also a problem affecting teaching and learning activities. In organizing activities to explore the plant world, the

availability of physical facilities and equipment is crucial for children to interact and for teachers to assess children's motor skills. However, the reality is that the provision of equipment in preschools in Tuyen Quang city is limited, and much of it is outdated.

Thirdly, considering the general family background of the children, children aged 5-6 are often encouraged by their families to familiarize themselves with numbers and letters. Therefore, activities to explore the plant world are often neglected and less integrated with other educational activities.

Lastly, apart from the objective difficulties such as overcrowded classes, inadequate teaching aids, and limited reference materials, the factor from the teacher's perspective is also a challenge in organizing activities to explore the plant world. Some teachers have not fully realized the role of the natural environment in children's development. They may hesitate to organize activities, lack initiative, and fail to utilize the available natural materials (collecting, making, mobilizing parents to provide toys and equipment). Some teachers are not proactive and rely heavily on the school's investment. They do not prioritize children's interests and positive attitudes, focusing more on providing and explaining knowledge to children rather than allowing them to experience, learn, and explore on their own.

2.3. Some Methods to Stimulate Interest in Exploring the Plant World for 5-6 Year Old Children in Preschool

2.3.1 Method 1: Creating Demand and Interest in Exploring the Plant World through Asking Question and Educational Situations

Stimulating children's curiosity, thirst for knowledge, and engaging their cognitive abilities and thinking processes are essential for fostering their interest in exploring the plant world.

Creating interest in exploring the plant world through questioning and cognitive situations aims to help children identify issues that need solving and guide them to find solutions independently. It also helps children perceive the symbols they encounter comprehensively, accurately, and deeply.

Asking questions through situations to create a need and interest in exploring the plant world for children is an art. Preschool teachers need to flexibly use various types of questions and diverse problem-solving scenarios to enhance children's cognitive interest.

When asking questions, teachers should organize them around the main focus of the lesson content. There are three main types of questions: questions arranged according to the sequence of cognition (based on children's sensory perception),...

Example: "Can you guess what the function of roots is for plants? Will these beans sprout if we plant them in moist soil after cooking them?"

To achieve real effectiveness in all cognitive activities in general and activities introducing children to the plant world in particular, this method must be applied. It stimulates children's passion and interest in exploring the essence of objects and is the most positive way for teachers to guide children to actively engage with objects.

Furthermore, teachers must accurately assess the abilities of each child because each child has a certain level of experience and capability. Therefore, teachers can present scenarios suitable for groups of children or individual children,

meaning that the scenarios should be within the children's problem-solving capabilities.

Especially, the condition to implement this method is to present situations that lie within the "zone of proximal development" of children. Children can solve these with the guidance and assistance of the teacher, aiming for their developmental progress.

2.3.2. Method 2: Combining Plant World Exploration Activities with Other Educational Activities to Stimulate Children's Interest

Organizing a variety of plant world exploration activities for children with a clear purpose and plan to serve the purpose of familiarizing children with exploring the plant world, reinforcing knowledge, expanding understanding, and honing skills such as memorization, comparison, and analysis for children.

Combining plant world exploration with educational games: Go to the right place for plants, flowers, vegetables, fruits...; find the other half of a flower (vegetable, fruit, or plant); assemble puzzles of different plants (flowers, vegetables, fruits).

Integrate plant world exploration with creative games typically used in corner activities (e.g., playing fruit vendor, food stalls, family roles).

Building games: Build a flower garden, build a fruit garden, build a vegetable garden... where children select the appropriate plants, flowers, vegetables, or fruits to place in the garden and correctly name their garden.

Movement games: Aim to reinforce children's knowledge of plant groups, the names of various plants, flowers, vegetables, or fruits, and develop their agility and classification skills.

Example: Through poems or songs like "Blooming Flowers" or "Visiting the Garden" children learn about the color names of different flowers, appreciate the beauty of each flower, and develop a desire to care for and protect them.

Combining plant world exploration with art activities:

Creative drawing (molding, tearing, pasting): After observing various plants, flowers, vegetables, and fruits, encourage children's creative enthusiasm by asking them to draw (mold, tear, paste) these elements.

Supplementary drawing (molding): Teachers can draw (mold) 1-2 plants, flowers, vegetables, or fruits, then ask children to draw (mold) additional items from the same group. Alternatively, the teacher can draw part of a plant, flower, vegetable, or fruit, prompting children to guess what it is and then draw to complete it.

In using this method, teachers should carefully select the type and level of guidance and control to ensure that the classroom atmosphere is truly lively and engaging.

Teachers play a crucial role in implementing methods to stimulate children's interest. For effective education, the following conditions are necessary:

Understanding the physiological characteristics of each child and the general objectives and tasks of group activities to apply the most suitable impact methods.

Having a certain level of professional competence and a solid grasp of basic knowledge about the plant world, teachers must equip themselves with broad and accurate knowledge to provide children. Combined with pedagogical requirements and capabilities, teachers must be dynamic and flexible to organize cognitive activities gently, attractively, and engagingly, capturing children's interest positively.

2.3.3 Method 3: Guiding and Encouraging Children to Collect Natural Materials while Actively Promoting Plant World Exploration

In addition to providing children with materials for the nature corner, we can guide children to collect various materials that they like to use in play corners, including the nature corner. Guiding and encouraging children to collect various materials for use in the nature corner is a form of education that fosters children's awareness of actively seeking and collecting materials for themselves. Through this collection process, children also imagine and generate unique and innovative ideas for shaping with the materials they find.

Observing children during playtime, preschool teachers need to identify children's attitudes and interests in the materials they often use. Based on this, appropriate guidance and suggestions can be provided to match each child's preferences in collecting various materials to create products.

At the end of play sessions, preschool teachers should have children describe the products they have created as well as the materials they have chosen to use. Questions can be asked to understand the children's ideas, encourage them to come up with new ideas, and suggest new ways of implementation. Children are required to use the materials they find to try to create something. Encourage children to come up with new and unique shaping methods. Preschool teachers can offer "rewards" to stimulate children's interest.

The relationship between preschool teachers and children, as well as among children themselves, must be open, sincere, fair, and democratic. There should be no constraints or force imposed on children regarding the search and selection of materials for their creations.

Preschool teachers need to present clever situations that stimulate children to come up with ideas and methods for shaping with new materials.

2.3.4. Method 4: Creating an Environment and Conditions to Stimulate Children's Interest in Exploring the Plant World

One of the important conditions for sparking and stimulating children's interest is the environment, both natural and social. Creating a spacious, airy, and hygienic play space with diverse, novel, and engaging materials is essential for children to feel comfortable, enthusiastic, and attentive when exploring the plant world. Therefore, preschool teachers need to frequently change and refresh the play environment, supplement materials for children to express themselves, and demonstrate creativity, fostering children's curiosity and observational skills.

Additionally, the art corner should be located near a water source to create interest and facilitate active participation from children in collecting and storing materials or water, making cleaning tools more convenient when necessary. This environment and condition are conducive to stimulating children's interest and development.

Constructing an attractive and dynamic play space involves teachers arranging play areas, locations, decorations, and providing diverse and reasonable materials to meet the needs of the art corner. This creates conditions that stimulate children's imaginative and creative thinking.

Creating a comfortable, friendly, sharing, and open atmosphere with children during plant world exploration activities ensures that children remain confident, cheerful, and carefree during daily activities. This is an important catalyst for nurturing children's interests.

Preschool teachers should bravely assign tasks to children that require active thinking and exploration to cultivate their creative abilities and prevent passivity and lack of confidence in children.

At the end of play sessions, preschool teachers should provide fair and objective evaluations of children's products. This instills confidence in children's abilities and talents through timely and appropriate praise and encouragement. However, overly exaggerated praise should be avoided to prevent children from becoming conceited and complacent. The plant exploration corner must meet the needs for independent and self-reliant activities of children, stimulating their active participation and interest. To achieve this, teachers need to provide children with many choices, and the space must be wide enough with adequate conditions for children to create products.

Selecting materials that stimulate children's interest must be appropriate and ensure hygiene, safety, and an adequate quantity. It is best to choose materials with multiple uses to encourage children to shape their ideas in various ways and to vary the materials to keep children engaged and attracted, supporting not only learning activities but also play and comprehensive development.

3. Conclusion

Stimulating the interest of preschool children aged 5-6 is a necessary endeavor. It not only fosters their harmonious physical, psychological, and personality development but also holds significant importance in their character education. Therefore, it stands as one of the crucial tasks in modern preschools, and naturally, it requires suitable educational measures from preschool teachers.

The method of stimulating interest in preschool children is closely tied to organizing activities that explore the plant world. It serves as a means to achieve educational goals. Organizing and guiding children to participate in activities exploring the plant world through appropriate educational methods will have a positive impact on the development of their interest.

In current practice in preschools, stimulating interest in 5-6 year old preschool children through activities exploring the plant world still faces many limitations. This is because the instructional methods provided by preschool teachers are often lacking, failing to capture the attention of the children. Moreover, opportunities for children to experience and explore diverse aspects through different corners and themes are not adequately provided.

Proposing methods to stimulate the interest of 5-6 year old preschool children in activities exploring the plant world is based on research on the physical and psychological development levels of children. It relies on understanding children's needs and respecting them, ensuring integration, flexibility, creativity, and safety, both physically and psychologically. It upholds the principle of "children as the center" while engaging in activities exploring the plant world.

4. Acknowledgement

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