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Effective Methods to Increase Primary School Students' Attention to the Lesson

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Abstract: This article examines effective methods for increasing primary school students' attention during lessons from the perspective of contemporary pedagogy and evidence-based classroom practice. In the context of primary education, attention is understood not as a purely clinical or psychological category, but as sustained on-task engagement, readiness to respond, active

participation, and the ability to maintain cognitive focus on learning tasks. The paper argues that attention in the classroom is not secured by one technique alone, but by a coherent instructional system that combines clear routines, well-structured explanations, active questioning, metacognitive support, careful management of cognitive load, and short movement breaks.

Keywords: attention, primary school, classroom engagement, lesson focus, classroom management, explicit instruction.

1. Introduction

In primary education, attention to the lesson is one of the essential conditions for successful learning. A child may be physically present in the classroom and still be only partially engaged in the actual learning process. For this reason, teachers and researchers increasingly distinguish between simple classroom presence and genuine on-task attention. In educational practice, attention is closely related to the learner's readiness to listen, follow instructions, respond to questions, shift between activities smoothly, and remain cognitively engaged long enough to understand and retain new material. When attention is weak, even a well-planned lesson loses much of its instructional value, because pupils miss explanations, fragment the task, and struggle to connect one step of learning to the next. Research and practice guides in elementary education show that attention problems in class are often influenced by the interaction of instruction, classroom environment, routines, task difficulty, and behavioral expectations, rather than by the child alone.

2. Materials and Methods

One of the most effective ways to increase attention in primary school lessons is to establish clear routines and a classroom environment that supports focus. The Institute of Education Sciences practice guide on reducing behavior problems in elementary classrooms recommends identifying the specifics of problem behavior, modifying the classroom learning environment to decrease problem behavior, and teaching and

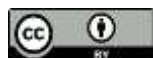
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reinforcing appropriate behaviors explicitly. The guide notes that problematic behavior is often triggered by a mismatch between the classroom setting or academic demands and students' strengths, preferences, or skills. It also points out that teachers should revisit routines, encourage instructional momentum, vary instructional strategies appropriately, and arrange the physical space so that students can access materials and the teacher can monitor engagement easily. These findings suggest that attention is not simply "lost"; it is often pushed away by weak transitions, excessive waiting time, unclear expectations, awkward seating, or tasks that are either too easy or too difficult. In practical terms, primary teachers can improve attention by using predictable entry routines, short "do now" tasks, smooth transitions, visible behavior expectations, and classroom layouts that reduce distraction and support teacher movement. A calm routine at the start of the lesson often does more for attention than ten reminders after the lesson has already fallen apart. [1].

A second powerful method is explicit instruction organized in small, manageable steps. Rosenshine's research-based principles of instruction emphasize beginning lessons with a short review, presenting new material in small steps, asking many questions, providing models, guiding student practice, checking for understanding, and ensuring sufficient practice and review. His discussion links this structure to the limits of working memory: when too much information is introduced at once, pupils become confused and their working memory is overwhelmed. More successful teachers therefore present only small amounts of new material at a time, check that students understand each point, and move to the next step only when the first has been sufficiently grasped. For primary school attention, this has direct implications. Young learners rarely sustain strong focus during long teacher monologues or heavily loaded explanations. They attend better when the lesson is segmented, when each explanation has a clear end point, and when practice follows quickly after instruction. The practical rule is simple: shorter explanation, quicker response, clearer next step. Attention weakens when children do not know where they are in the lesson; it strengthens when each stage feels manageable and purposeful. [3].

3. Results and Discussion

Frequent questioning and active participation are equally important. Rosenshine notes that asking a large number of questions and checking the responses of all students helps pupils practice new information and connect it to prior learning. His synthesis also indicates that classrooms where teachers increased factual and process questions during guided practice showed higher student achievement. For primary school lessons, the relevance goes beyond achievement scores: frequent questioning keeps attention active because pupils anticipate response rather than settle into passive listening. Attention is stronger when the child is mentally preparing an answer, comparing alternatives, or explaining a step, even briefly. This is why effective primary classrooms often use choral response, mini whiteboards, pair talk, quick checks, think-aloud prompts, and cold-call routines that involve the whole class without creating fear. Attention does not flourish in silence if the silence is merely passive. It grows where pupils are expected to think often and respond often. The lesson should feel less like a radio broadcast and more like a guided conversation with structure. [3].

Another effective method is to teach pupils simple metacognitive routines so they can direct and maintain their own attention more consciously. According to the Education Endowment Foundation, metacognition and self-regulation approaches support pupils in planning, monitoring, and evaluating their learning more explicitly. The EEF toolkit explains that teachers can model their own thinking, prompt pupils to set goals, activate prior knowledge, use self-questioning, and provide structured opportunities for reflection. The evidence base summarized there also suggests that explicit teaching of such strategies is more effective when embedded within normal curriculum content rather than treated as a separate "thinking skills" lesson. For primary students, this means attention can be

strengthened when the teacher teaches them what to focus on, why it matters, and how to check themselves during a task. Statements like “First, read the question carefully; next, underline the key word; then check if your answer matches the task” guide attention in a concrete way. Similarly, asking children to predict what they will learn, notice when they are confused, and review how they solved a problem encourages them to keep their minds attached to the lesson rather than drifting away. In this sense, attention becomes not only something the teacher demands, but something the pupil begins to manage. [2].

The management of cognitive load is also central to sustaining attention. Research on multimedia learning shows that learners process information more effectively when extraneous material is reduced rather than added. Mayer’s principles for reducing extraneous processing include coherence, signaling, redundancy, spatial contiguity, and temporal contiguity. In practical classroom terms, this means pupils learn better when irrelevant decoration, excessive text, confusing layouts, and competing streams of information are minimized, and when cues highlight the essential structure of what is being taught. This insight is highly relevant to primary education, where attention is easily diverted by unnecessary visual clutter, overly busy slides, dense worksheets, or instructions that mix too many demands at once.

4. Conclusion

Effective methods to increase primary school students’ attention to the lesson are rooted in structured, responsive, and evidence-informed teaching. The most useful approaches are not isolated tricks but interconnected practices: clear routines, supportive classroom environments, explicit instruction in small steps, frequent questioning, guided practice, metacognitive support, reduced cognitive overload, and short movement breaks. Research from classroom management, instructional design, metacognition, and physical activity studies indicates that pupils remain more attentive when lessons are predictable without being dull, challenging without being overwhelming, and active without becoming chaotic.

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