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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING STORIES IN DEVELOPING YOUNG LEARNERS' COGNITIVE SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

Stories are fundamental when teaching young learners and the use of stories in the English classroom offers an effective way of introducing new language in a meaningful and memorable context. Moreover, they develop an understanding, respect and appreciation for other cultures, and can promote a positive attitude to people from different lands, races and religions. So, this article deals with the importance of using stories in enhancing young learner's language skills, as well as cognitive skills.

KEYWORDS: *Storytelling, Young Learners, Language Acquisition, Cognitive Development, Language Skills, Communicative Activities.*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English to young learners is rapidly growing in Uzbekistan and pupils are being taught in learner-centered classes, using different effective innovative ways of teaching English, such as playing English games, watching English cartoons or interesting TV programs, telling stories, in order to encourage them to use English in real communication and to promote their both cognitive development and language acquisition. The main goal of teaching young learners has become to improve young learners' communicative skills, competency and culture using different effective ways of teaching English and the goal of English teachers at primary classes have become to have their language learners to speak proficiently and independently in various situations. As we know, cognitive development refers to the way in which a child learns, solves problems, acquires knowledge about the surrounding environment and increases the ability to interact with it. Children acquire different cognitive skills as they meet certain developmental milestones. As a teacher, we can help young learners improve their cognitive development in

memory, concentration, attention, perception, imagination and creativity with educational toys, games, and, of course, with the help of stories.

The primary school group means young learners from five to ten years old. During this short period children develop very much. It is a very individual process, but certain characteristics can be traced and generalized. Of course, the nature of foreign language learning is influenced by what they can or cannot do in their first language. As young children are very imaginative, full of enthusiasm and energy, and learn more if they are enjoying what they are doing, for them different educational games, as well as listening and acting different stories and tales are considered to be a very effective way of learning a foreign language.

We know that everybody loves a good story, especially children. They are already familiar with the stories in the mother tongue, and the use of stories in the English classroom offers an effective way of introducing new language in a meaningful and memorable context.

Stories-whether they are fairy tales, folktales, legends, fables, are based on real-life incidents experienced by younger learners themselves - can help learners appreciate and respect the culture and the values of various groups. Using stories in the classroom is fun, as they create a motivating and challenging atmosphere in the classroom and help children to develop and enhance a positive attitude towards English. Stories are also a powerful tool for children's holistic development, as they foster language learning and support emotional, social and intellectual development.

Researchers generally believe that storytelling plays an important role in the development of language skills in L2, as well as cognitive, creative and critical thinking skills by promoting social interactions and mutual collaboration in the L2 classroom. Now many linguistics and ESL teachers agree on that younger learners learn to speak in the second language by "interacting". Communicative language teaching and collaborative learning serve best for this aim. Communicative language teaching is based on real-life situations that require communication. By using this method in ESL classes, younger learners will have the opportunity of communicating with each other in the target language and teachers should create a classroom environment where younger learners have real-life communication, authentic activities, and meaningful tasks that promote oral language. This can occur when learners collaborate in groups to achieve a goal or to complete a task. With the help of teacher and different visuals younger learners can briefly summarize a tale or story they heard from somebody beforehand, or they may create their own stories to tell their classmates. Story telling fosters creative thinking. It also helps learners express ideas in the format of beginning, development, and ending, including the characters and setting a story has to have.

Methodologists, Slattery & Willis analysed the role of stories in teaching young learners and showed the importance of stories in improving young learners' language acquisition and cognitive skills, as they say: *"Young learners acquire language unconsciously. The activities you do in class should help this kind of acquisition. Stories are the most valuable resource you have. They offer children a world of supported meaning that they can relate to. Later on you can use stories to help children practice listening, speaking, reading, and writing"*. In addition, Cameron states that stories use a holistic approach to language teaching and learning as *"stories offer a whole imaginary world, created by language that children can enter and enjoy, learning language as they go"*.

So, stories are unquestionably a significant tool in the learning process. They are not only a rich resource in language learning and teaching, but also they offer a wider window on the world, and through them children learn much more than words. Telling stories can reduce the stress in the classroom, promote literacy, speaking and listening skills, help children to develop thinking strategies and promoting their cognitive and emotional development. Through stories, we see how very different people share the same life experiences and how human nature can transcend culture, as well as telling stories increase children's exposure to English and help them build their own vocabulary, involving them directly in their learning process. Moreover, it is an easy way to attract young learners' attention to learning, as they are interested in acting out.

Methodologists have defined the following reasons to use stories in teaching:

- Children enjoy and are always eager to listen to stories; they also know how stories work;
- Stories are a rich and versatile resource and children are intrinsically motivated to them;
- They are fun, motivating and can be used in a number of different ways to develop different skills and topics, this way stories also contribute to developing positive attitudes towards language learning;
- They involve children in their learning process;
- They provide endless resources of language in context;
- They are a great way of introducing, practising, revising vocabulary and structures and improving pronunciation and listening skills. They introduce new illustrated vocabulary and are a springboard to different activities and even to other curriculum areas, involving different learning styles;
- They improve pronunciation and listening skills. Children become aware of the rhythm, intonation and pronunciation of language;
- They provide repetition of key words and phrases, stimulating children's participation;
- They provide opportunities for integrating the four basic language skills;
- They add variety and creativity to lessons;
- They foster positive interpersonal attitudes and develop intercultural awareness as they are also a source for cultural content;

In conclusion, we can state that implementation of stories in teaching young learners provides a possibility to communicate in real-life situations, discussing the report and presenting it, as well as, it plays beneficial role in improving young learners' not only language skills, but also cognitive development skills.

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