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**BENEFITS OF IMPLEMENTING STORY-BASED APPROACH
IN IMPROVING YOUNG LEARNERS' COGNITIVE SKILLS**

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Abstract: *This article highlights benefits of using story-based approach in enhancing young learner's language skills, as well as cognitive skills. 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.*

Key words: *story-based approach, young learners, language acquisition, cognitive development, language skills, communicative activities.*

The communicative or learner-centered approach has been adopted and different effective innovative ways of teaching English are being used in order to encourage younger learners to use English in real communication and to promote their cognitive development.

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 cognitive development in memory, concentration, attention, perception, imagination and creativity with educational toys, games, and of course, with the help of stories. Everybody loves a good story, especially children. They are already familiar with 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

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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.

Methodologists, Slattery & Willis analysed the role of stories in teaching young learners and showed the importance of them 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.”*

According to Cameron 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”*.

Telling stories can reduce the stress in classroom, promote literacy, speaking and

listening skills, help children to develop thinking strategies and promoting their cognitive and emotional development.

A story-based approach is structured around pre-, while- and post storytelling activities, but, first, teachers should select stories carefully according to their teaching objectives and their pupils' needs. Teachers should think carefully about the aims they want to achieve, brainstorm possible activities, think about time, links across the curriculum and classroom language, prepare the materials and turn their ideas into individual lesson plans. While planning story-based lessons, the following pre-, while, post reading activities can play a pivotal role in promoting young learners' cognitive development:

+ ***Pre-reading activities***

- *Show the cover and the title and talk about them*
- *Predict what is going to happen through the title or a picture*

+ ***While-reading activities***

- *Predict what is going to happen next / Guess the ending*
- *Repeat and mime vocabulary*
- *Hold up cards*
- *Sequence parts of the story*
- *Yes/no questions*

+ ***Post-reading activities***

- *Order pictures / sequence events*

FAN, TA'LIM, TEXNOLOGIYA VA ISHLAB CHIQRISH INTEGRATSIYASI ASOSIDA RIVOJLANISH ISTIQBOLLARI NOMLI III ILMYI ONLAYN KONFERENSIYA

- *Choose another title*
- *Make a mini-book, a collage, a poster*
- *Play games*
- *Read or act out the story*
- *Sing a song*
- *Make puppets/masks and retell the story*
- *Project work*

While the above-mentioned communicative activities are in progress, the teacher no longer “teaches”, she organizes, sets up activities and “monitors” her pupils using different interaction patterns. Thus, knowing the abilities and capabilities of the children is of vital importance to teach them effectively using story-based approach.

There are a lot of advantages of using stories in teaching languages to young learners. Telling stories can:

- ✦ reduce the stress in classroom;
- ✦ promote literacy, speaking and listening skills of young learners;
- ✦ help children to develop thinking strategies and promoting their social and emotional development
- ✦ allow the child to **use** his or her imagination more fully;
- ✦ enable children to empathise with unfamiliar people/places/situations
- ✦ offer insights into different traditions and values
- ✦ help children understand how wisdom is common to all peoples/all cultures

So, the benefits of implementing story-based approach to teaching languages and promoting young learners’ language and cognitive skills are great not only for learners but also for teachers, because stories:

- ✦ *Promote a feeling of well-being and relaxation;*
- ✦ *Increase children's willingness to communicate thoughts and feelings;*
- ✦ *Encourage active participation and cooperation between students;*
- ✦ *Increase verbal proficiency;*
- ✦ *Encourage use of imagination and creativity;*
- ✦ *Enhance listening skills*

In conclusion, we can state that teaching young learners through story-based approach provides a possibility to communicate in real-life situations, discussing the report and presenting it. 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.

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Moreover, it is an easy way to attract young learners' attention to learning, as they are interested in acting out.

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