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# IMPROVING CHILDREN'S COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE AND PERFORMANCE THROUGH STORYTELLING MODEL

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## ÖZET

*Bu makalenin amacı, hikaye anlatma yönteminin 3-8 yaşları arasındaki çocukların kültürel, zihinsel, dilsel, sosyo-duygusal, ruhsal katkılarını gözden geçirerek, ağırlıklı olarak, hikaye anlatma yöntemi yoluyla çocukların hem ana dil hem de erek dil gelişimini irdelemektir. Buna ek olarak, çocukların dil gelişimi için hikaye-odaklı bir dil öğretim modeli önererek, bu süreç içerisinde, hikaye anlatma tekniklerinin sınıf içinde etkili bir biçimde nasıl uygulanacağı hakkında ilköğretimde görev yapan öğretmenlere bazı önerilerde bulunulmaktadır.*

*Anahtar sözcükler: Hikaye anlatma, ana dil gelişimi, iletişimsel kapasite, sosyo-duygusal gelişim*

## ABSTRACT

*The aim of this article is to review the contributions of storytelling techniques to the cultural, cognitive, linguistic, socio-emotional, and psychological development of children between 3 and 8 year-old, and to go through both the mother tongue and target language development of children at an early- and middle-aged. In addition to this, some suggestions will be made for teachers who teach in elementary schools how to apply storytelling procedure of language development of the children effectively in classroom by proposing a story-based model.*

*Key words: Storytelling, language development, communicative capacity, socio-emotional development*

## 1. RATIONALE

Most of us have attained our personal development by hearing and narrating short stories, legends, anecdotes, poems during childhood. From childhood to adulthood, most of us tended to assimilate the smell of stories and legends blended with social, moral, emotional, linguistic values.

It is an undeniable fact that human beings have benefited from educational role of storytelling at a great extent in order to maintain their personal development (Widdowson 1982). It is also observed that storytelling has been commonly used as an educational process at elementary level for a long time.

In my opinion, it is not possible to limit the contributions and usefulness of story telling to the children's education as it overcomes many barriers of children in different cultures, helps teachers become more responsive to children and improve children's communicative competence and performance.

## 2. LITERATURE

On one hand the pendulum of the clock has been swinging from nature and nurture put

forward by behaviourists and social learning theorists on the other hand, it is possible to witness the effects of storytelling in the process of children's life-span development. It is clear that children have already experienced the harmonised values of story telling by integrating the learning theories mentioned above and reflecting the contributions of them from socio-emotional, cognitive-language and psychological perspectives.

As Moody (1971) states, story telling makes four contributions to learning in relation to personal development. They are people's sensory, intellectual, affective, social and perhaps religious faculties. It would be useful to handle the matter from these perspectives.

### 2.1. Cultural Contributions of Storytelling

Storytelling is one of the several tools of access to intercultural understanding. According to Lazer (1993), for example, story telling is a way of contextualizing how a member of a particular society might behave or react in a specific situation. The world of short stories presents learners a full and vivid context in which characters with many social backgrounds can be depicted. This culture is at best

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somewhat unfamiliar, and often completely unknown to learners who are both in the kindergarten and elementary schools. Teachers who have struggled with this difficulty have always found a solution in the cultural values and transmitted them through short stories. In this way, learners have some knowledge about their thoughts, feelings and customs.

Tutaş (2000) also emphasizes the significance of storytelling and states that the cultural benefits of studying storytelling are hard to ignore since it mirrors national culture and can therefore acquaint students with the aesthetic, moral and spiritual values of the nation and the rules of the social system.

## **2.2. Linguistics Values of Storytelling**

Most of the literary works are not created for the specific purpose of teaching a language. A language classroom which is outside the community of native speakers is isolated from the context of events and situation which produce natural language. As for storytelling, language creates its own context. Learners are, thus, exposed to language that is as genuine and undistorted as can be managed in the classroom situation. Moreover, as Povey (1979) and Yorke (1986) pointed out, story telling would enhance the basic skills by extending linguistic knowledge in the areas of vocabulary, grammar, syntax and semantics.

## **2.3. Psychological Contributions of The Storytelling**

Storytelling is helpful in the language learning process, for it has the characteristic of being a motivating factor. The learner is completely absorbed into the story as it is a good way to combine instruction and entertainment (Stockdale, 1995). Pursuing the development of the story, the learner feels close to certain characters in the book. The learners expect their heroes and heroines to overcome any difficulty they meet and be successful in their work. According to Ellis (1996: 31), since storytelling provides stimulating and enjoyable learning experience, it is very motivating for children to understand a story in both a mother tongue and target language. In this way, the learner engages imaginatively with the story and this moves the focus of his or her attention from the more

mechanical aspects of language system. Therefore, the learner unconsciously or consciously improves his or her communicative competence and performance.

## **2.4. Storytelling has an Educational Value on Language Enrichment**

Needless to say, storytelling improves learners' control of the language; thus, they should have four skills in order to communicate in both mother tongue and target languages. Lee (1970) claims that storytelling in language is language at its best. He crystallises this argument by emphasising that "It is in storytelling that the resources of the language are most fully and skillfully used"

In addition to this, storytelling models a wide range of communicative strategies. It is claimed that storytelling displays a broader range of communication strategies than any other single teaching component. Moreover, it is a teaching aid for all language skills. As Povey (1967:42) points out, "storytelling extends linguistic knowledge by giving evidence of extensive and subtle vocabulary usage and complex and exact syntax" It is known that by reading a substantial and contextualized body of text, learners gain familiarity with any features of the written language, and this broadens their own writing skills. Through extensive reading of a novel or a story, they gain the ability to make inferences from linguistic clues and deduce meaning from context both of which are useful in reading. Needless to say, by means of storytelling, listening-speaking abilities can also be developed through many activities, such as asking and answering questions, discussion, and summarizing.

## **2.5. Storytelling Makes Socio-emotional Contributions**

Ellis (1996:31) states that involving stories in class is a social experience which provokes a shared response of sadness, excitement and anticipation, encouraging social and emotional development. Oster (1989) also supported by emphasizing that storytelling can help foster academic skills by minimizing the threat, and it deals with the emotions and encourages the learners risk-taking.

## 2.6. Storytelling can encourage creative/critical thinking of children

According to Spack (1985), Integrating a story, making inferences, formulating their own ideas and supporting generalization teach learners to think critically. Such training helps them in other courses which demand "logical reasoning, independent thinking and carefully analysis of text"

In this way, it seems that storytelling can not only help to encourage critical thinking but can help them to encourage think creatively and imaginative interactions of children in terms of problem solving.

Widdowson (1983) regards creativity as "crucial concept in language learning.... the human capacity for making sense, for negotiating meaning, for finding expression for new experience in metaphor, for refashioning reality in the image of new ideas and new ideals."

## 3. A SUGGESTED STORY-BASED MODEL FOR THE LEARNERS AT AN EARLY AGE

In this part, a story-based model is presented as it demonstrates learning language is a continuous and life-long process. If this model is practiced in the classes effectively and efficiently from the start to the revision part it is supposed that the story-based model will improve children's communicative capacity. The model has some important components such as; determination of the learners' needs, formulation of objectives, selection of the content, implementation of the model and the evaluation of the result, each of which will be analyzed in detail.

### 3.1. Learners' Needs

As a first step to design curriculum is the determination of the learners' needs. First of all, it is necessary for the teachers to know for what purpose they design such curriculum. In this model, teachers' aim is to facilitate and foster children's language skills such as; reading, writing, speaking and listening at an early and middle-age.

It is necessary that the teacher know about the children's educational background, motivation and determine their societal needs.

### 3.2. Formulation of Objectives

In this model, three domains of educational objectives cognitive, affective and psychomotor are handled.

In this story-based curricula, objectives should be taxonomized according to **affective** domain parts (*receiving, responding, valuing and organisation*) **cognitive** domain parts (*knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation*) and **psychomotor** domain parts (*sound discrimination, sound production, gestures, mimics*).

In this process, by the end of the course, the learners will have possessed an awareness of linguistic, psycholinguistic, discorsal, communicative, strategic, cognitive and semantic features of the language to be learned / acquired effectively.

### 3.3. Selection of the Content

Selection of the content requires an ability to evaluate stories and to discriminate between those that meet learners' needs and those that do not. Therefore, it is the teachers' issue to choose the suitable materials for the levels of the learners who are both in kindergartens and elementary schools.

Dubin and Olshtein (1986:29) suggest some ways to teachers who are teaching in kindergartens and elementary schools while teachers are choosing materials for learners at an early- and middle- age.

- Teachers should choose stories they like since children at an early stage tend towards folk talks for their simplicity of structure and language.

- It is also significant to find stories that children like, and stories that match children's age and language levels. It should be kept in mind that using repetitive language is good for children at this stage.

- It is necessary for educators to choose stories with a simple structure, consistent style, conflict resolution, interesting subject matter and strong emotional content.
- It is also crucial that we choose stories with positive values expressing joy, compassion, humour, resourcefulness and other aspects of human nature.

### 3.4. Implementation of the Model

After the content has been selected and organised, the teaching and learning process should be organised and implemented according to the level of the learners.

In my opinion, it would be better to go through some effective teaching techniques to be employed in this model as *pre-implementation* and *while-implementation* stages follows;

#### 3.4.1. Pre-implementation Stage

In the pre-implementation stage, teachers should outline and plan what to do before starting to tell a story and should do necessary preparations to carry out story telling process effectively.

- Before presenting the story-based model, teachers should start introducing the characters, setting the scene, establishing the mood and arousing pleasurable anticipation.
- It is necessary that teachers create a mood through their physical appearance (Kantarcioglu, 1991).
- It is essential that teachers prepare the devices to develop creativity and to attract the attention of story-listeners such as objects, puppets, costumes, bells, crafts, masks and collages.
- Using facial expressions or/and gestures that come naturally are also important aids in this atmosphere.
- Another important point that should be underlined is that teachers should pay attention to the physical settings and classroom atmosphere. They need well-lit, acoustically acceptable and comfortable spaces.
- The stories that sound simple and boring should be considered to be equipped with sequences of pictures.

- Teachers should pay attention to the time-limit, depending on children's ages.

- Children should be allowed to imitate and utter the interesting and different voices related to the story.

- Preparing hardware and the software documents of technological devices such as, video-cassettes, computer disks, tape-cassettes is another effective motivating factor that should be taken into consideration in story-based classes (Kantarcioglu, 1991).

#### 3.4.2. While-implementation Stage

Pedersen (1995) outlines the principles of story-telling and advice to the story-tellers what to do and how to do in while-implementation process in class as follows;

- During the storytelling process, teachers should concentrate on their voice, trying for a pleasant, intimate, smooth and low-pitched tone of voice. It should be born in mind that, in this process, changing the speed and pitch adds to the emotional impact.
- In order to affect and control the story-listeners, teachers should maintain eye contact with children. Using this technique is very important, as it holds the story-listeners' attention checks their understanding and gives instant feedback to children
- Teachers are advised to invent exercises in phonetics, semantics, and syntax. There is no limit to the language exercises that can be based on a story: introduction of new vocabulary in lexical sets; verbal practice and grammatical analysis of repeated phrases and rhyming sets.
- Story-tellers are recommended to do listening activities. After a story, listeners can demonstrate comprehension by: comparing, discriminating, predicting, sequencing, classifying, transferring information. Unlike other listening activities, stories are often repeated, but never in exactly the same words.
- It is required that teachers should do written activities to improve learners writing skills. Rewriting, summarizing or paraphrasing a tale are worthwhile activities. Written exercises can include controlled writing dictation and guided

writing as sentence extension or sentence-combining exercises.

- While telling stories children should be given a chance of asking questions and should not be interrupted (Kantarcioglu, 1991).

### 3.5. Evaluation of the Results

Evaluation, as the *post-story-telling phase* of this model, has two roles. One is to control the learners' success through exams, the other is to revise the programme and to provide feedback to the whole curriculum system. While assessing the learners' progress, teachers should use communicative tests such as role-playing, retelling the story, restructuring, the paper and pencil tests they prepare themselves and portfolio which facilitates children to prepare project work for a year long. Teachers can ask learners to choose the best project among the ones they prepared, later the teacher can file children's best project. Teachers should pay attention to the different testing techniques below:

As stated before, the aim of story telling is to increase children's understanding. For this reason, teachers should check the results of the procedure by using various techniques to attain this goal. One of these techniques is to present multiple choice questions and the questions that can be answered by inference. The other is to use supposition techniques such as "What would you do if you were him/her?" or "What should the character have done?"

- The most useful way to test learners' performance is to give out comprehension questions, and have learners construct their story.

- Another way of checking learners' understanding is to ask comprehension questions. In this phase, it would be better to use WH- question words such as, who, what, where, when, but not why questions at first.

- Story-tellers are also advised to do oral activities to foster language development of the children. Choral reading, story fill-in, add-on stories, building a tale from key words etc., are all options. Story-listeners can retell their favourite tales or invent stories based on their own personal experiences

- Teachers make learners do creative drama. It should be kept in mind that stories naturally lend themselves to be dramatised, mimed, or to role-play.

- It is also useful for learners to recite or role play some dialogues extracted from the story by themselves.

As a consequence of the evaluation process, as Demirel (1991) states, if the programme is not satisfactory, it is advised to revise the programme starting from stating the objectives up to the evaluation system.

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

In this study, contributions of story telling to the development of the learners at an early and middle-childhood from social, educational, psychological, linguistic and cultural aspects were examined.

In this study, a new story-based model was designed and proposed for the learners at an early age at elementary level.

The components of the model in question above aim at facilitating language development of the children who are between 3 and 8 year-olds.

If teachers manipulate the procedures of the model effectively the model above is supposed to make adequate contribution to learners at elementary level as the suggested model presents full teaching and learning process

It is also possible to apply the model to learners who are in need of both mother tongue and target language supports as it seems to be a way to tie both mother tongue and target language to the stories which they are still studying in primary and elementary schools.

While applying the storytelling model from the *start* to the *revision* teachers are advised to:

- know about children's educational background, motivation and determine their societal needs.
- Help learners possess an awareness of linguistic, psycholinguistic, discoursal, communi-

cative, strategic, cognitive and semantic features of the language effectively.

- choose stories with a simple structure, consistent style, conflict resolution, interesting subject matter and strong emotional content that are suitable their age and language levels.
- start introducing the characters, setting the scene, establishing the mood and arousing pleasurable anticipation and create a mood through their physical appearance and prepare the devices to develop creativity and attract the attention of story-listeners.
- concentrate on their voice, trying for a pleasant, intimate, smooth and low-pitched tone of voice and maintain eye contact with children and give them a chance of asking questions.
- make the listeners do listening activities and demonstrate the comprehension by comparing, discriminating, predicting, sequencing, classifying, transferring information and make them do written activities to improve their writing skills.
- check the results of the procedure by using various techniques to attain this goal by presenting multiple choice questions and the questions that can be answered by inference, using supposition techniques, asking comprehension questions, having the learners construct their story by doing oral activities to foster language development of the children and making the learners do creative drama

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