

## Evaluating the effect of storyline theme on cognitive learning development of children and adolescents

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### Abstract

Children and adolescents are active learners who are influenced by their environment. Many theories are suggested in this regard, but one of these theories is Piaget's theory of cognitive learning development (CLD). This theory was applied in a book titled "why did the river fall silent" by Tamer, which has been translated into several different languages. This study aims to evaluate the effect of storyline theme on CLD of children and adolescents according to the Tamer's stories. This would be considered by academic managers and researchers in the field of children and adolescent training and can be modeled on it. The research findings indicate that, theme of storyline would allow children and adolescents to think about the events and understand the experiences, so these features would possibly transmit to children and adolescents when they are expressed in an intelligent way through fascinating theme; besides, this feature would possibly create emotional tension and present mental challenges, which tend to promote CLD in children and adolescents.

**Keywords:** CLD, Children, Adolescents, Piaget's theory, Theme.

## Evaluar el efecto del tema de la historia en el desarrollo del aprendizaje cognitivo de niños y adolescentes

### Resumen

Los niños y adolescentes son aprendices activos que se ven influenciados por su entorno. Se sugieren muchas teorías a este respecto, pero una de estas teorías es la teoría de Piaget del desarrollo del aprendizaje cognitivo (CLD). Esta teoría fue aplicada en un libro titulado "¿Por qué el río se quedó en silencio?" De Tamer, que ha sido traducido a varios idiomas diferentes. Este estudio tiene como objetivo evaluar el efecto del tema de la historia en la CLD de niños y adolescentes según las historias de Tamer. Esto sería considerado por directores académicos e investigadores en el campo de la formación de niños y adolescentes y puede ser modelado a partir de él. Los hallazgos de la investigación indican que el tema de la trama permitiría a los niños y adolescentes pensar sobre los hechos y comprender las vivencias, por lo que estas características posiblemente se transmitan a los niños y adolescentes cuando se expresan de manera inteligente a través de un tema fascinante; además, esta característica posiblemente genere tensión emocional y presente desafíos mentales, que tienden a promover la CLD en niños y adolescentes.

**Palabras clave:** CLD, niños, adolescentes, La teoría de piaget, Tema.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The set of quantitative and qualitative changes that continue from fertilization to death is called growth, and cognition includes what we know or think. But genetic epistemology is the regular and gradual change in mental processing that causes maturity. The main cause of certain changes would be the passage of time with the development and systematization of the nervous system, which appears with the acquisition of competencies and abilities of that behavior.

The great Syrian writer Zakariyya Tamer has 51 stories in the book titled " why did the river fall silent?" (Tamer, 2012) which he had written for children and adolescents.

Zakariyya Tamer's book has three characteristics:

1. Simplicity of expression and topics. Tamer does not speak of complex situations and philosophical thoughts and strange subjects but of simple and real things in this world. Simplicity of expression does not mean the naivety and superficiality that some people think, despite his simplicity of expression; he has addressed the main issues of the world today in the political, economic, social and moral spheres. One of the features of Tamer stories is the simplicity of their language. Literary arrays such as simile and irony are used to a very small extent in prose, and the only array that is very impressive is the recognition array. He has told most of his stories by reviving the main characters of his stories such as toys, natural elements, animals and plants. For this reason, his stories are considered unrealistic.
2. Another characteristic of his stories is focusing on one meaning, and this increases the impact of those meanings on the CLD of children and adolescents.
3. The attention to CLD and upbringing of children and adolescents is quite clear in his book.

This research seems necessary because the effect of Zakaria's stories on the CLD of children and adolescents can inspire writers in the field of children's education.

The objectives of this research would be evaluating the effect of storyline theme on

CLD of children and adolescents according to the Tamer's storey book titled "why did the river fall silent?"

## Material and methods

This research has studied the subject at theoretical levels based on descriptive-analytical method. The necessary data and information have been collected in a library method using books, articles, and dissertations related to the research topic.

In this regard, a book entitled "why did the river fall silent" by Zakariyya Tamer was evaluated and in this way, Tamer's thoughts became acquainted. Then, based on the descriptive-analytical method, the messages of the stories in the book were extracted. After that, Piaget's theories on CLD were studied and taken. In the next step, based on the information obtained, a relatively complete description of the subject was provided.

### *Subject processing and analysis*

#### *Zakariyya Tamer, Children and Adolescent*

The growth of Arab children's and adolescent fiction began in the 1970s. It is only in this decade that the literary researchers would be able to find an acceptable technical level in the fictional works of children and adolescents in the Arab lands (Al-Faisal, 1998: 10).

Tamer is the father of short stories and children's literature in Syria. After years of writing stories for adults, Tamer began writing stories for children after the Arab countries defeated against Israel.

Zakariyya Tamer turned his attention to children's writing at the same time, in 1968; after a short time, his special language and concepts about children's literature attracted a lot of attention.

"Tamer wrote many stories for children, and the stories have spread throughout the Arab world, Europe, and Israel. His works were translated into the different languages of the world. Tamer's stories formed the beginning of the right path for Arab children, who spread human, ethnic and militant values in a novel language and in the form of modern art. Tamer believed that children could not grow up healthy in a society where parents suffered from oppression and misery. In his view, the first thing that needs to be done is the freedom of the greater ones than anything that harms their humanity and

hinders their progress”(Al-Smadi, 1995: 26).

The famous Arab defeat against Israel on June 5, 1967, was closely linked to developments in children's and adolescent fiction. Many writers in the field of children's and adolescent literature, after this defeat, dealt with the war and its effects on this group. Failure on emotions of Zakariyya Tamer was also very influential. Tamer says about this influence: my connection with reality became more and my view of children became wider. They were a generation that had to respond to this savage enemy; so we had to give them a sense of struggle. They had to change drastically to become a generation capable of sacrificing themselves for justice, freedom and prosperity”( Al-Mousa, 2010: 76).

Tamer quickly became famous for writing children's and teens' stories, and many of his stories caught the public's attention. Tamer's stories are a true picture of the contemporary world and the violence that pervades it. He is not a man of peace and compromise in his writings. Tamer takes Arab children, along with the protagonists and main characters of his story, to the edge of the abyss of reality (albeit bitter and biting). The sadness in Tamer's child stories makes them sad and bitter, but the bitterness of his stories is accompanied by a sense of revenge of the child and adolescent against the rebels, oppressors and insurgents of the time, and this is how Tamer aims to awaken the young Arab generation.

Tamer has also written about the CLD and moral, social and economic education of children and adolescents and has written interesting non-realistic stories in which topics such as avoiding arrogance, avoiding flattery and hypocrisy, helping fellow human beings, being honest, superiority. He has expressed spiritual beauties in relation to physical beauties and so on.

*Stages of cognitive development of children and adolescents based on Piaget theory*

Jean Piaget is a French researcher, philosopher, and one of the theorists of learning. Although Piaget is not considered as a theorist of learning, but his researches on the stages of mental development of children and adolescents have placed him among the cognitive learning psychologists (Qolipour, 1997: 101-10) His theory is known as "CLD" (Qolipour,

1997: 100) and also developmental cognition (Parsa, 1993: 266).

Piaget considers learning to be possible due to mental growth and development and trade with the social and material environment, so he considers the psychological and intellectual development of learners due to four things: 1. Natural and biological growth 2. Experience in material and physical environment 3. Experience in a social environment 4. Equilibrium. (Qolipour, 1997: 101and 102).

Mental processes or cognition determine the factor affecting individual growth and to study cognition, one must examine the stages that make it up.

Since birthday, a person is constantly surrounded by external visual and auditory factors, and as he or she grows, they become aware of each of them. This cognition is not merely knowledge, but gathers scattered information, organizes it, and makes it meaningful. This natural process is the source of the "information processing" or "news reporting" approach.

The stages of CLD of children and adolescents according to Piaget are:

*sensorimotor stage*

sensorimotor stage is from birthday to 2 years old. At this stage, the child cannot internalize the outside world in his mind; therefore, his cognitive activities are limited to sensory and motor actions. This stage ends with the acquisition of thought and language (Qolipour, 1997: 101-102).

*Pre-operational thinking stage*

The stage of preoperative thinking (Preoperative Thinking) includes Piaget until the age of seven, in which the child acquires logical and operational thinking completely (Qolipour, 1997: 104). This stage has two sub-stages as follows:

*Pre-conceptual thinking*

Pre-conceptual thinking is from about two to four years old. During this period, children learn based on conceptual learning. They begin to classify objects according to their similarities, but make mistakes in terms of their concepts; therefore, they believe that all men are "Daddy" and all women are "Mama" and all toys are "mine". The logic of children in this

period of evolution is not deductive, not inductive, but allegorical (Hergenhahn et al., 2010: 359)

#### *Intuitive thinking*

It is from about four to about seven years old. During this period, children solve problems intuitively, but not according to some kind of rule and logic (Qolipour, 1997: 105).

At this stage, many improvements are made in the development of the child's language. This is rapid growth and is a reflection of the development of symbolic thinking and rapid growth in children's conceptual abilities. Concepts such as trees and trucks are tangible to the child because they exist physically in the outside world. Children at this stage have a very limited idea of abstract concepts such as truth, freedom and patriotism (Karimi, 2017: 32)

Children in this age group can hardly see issues from the perspective of others (Karimi, 2017: 33 and 32). Therefore, children can only empathize with others when they feel and think like themselves.

#### *Real operational stage (tangible operation stage)*

It includes ages between eight and twelve, and the child can think logically about real problems.

The child at this stage would think more logical, flexible and organized than in early childhood, but only in the case of objects and objective activities, the child at this stage cannot classify objects and numbers and the rule of stability of objects

In addition, the child begins to empathize on others. This ability helps him to communicate with others and deal with conflicts and incompatibilities.

At this stage of development, the child's activity in relation to the environment is noticeable. The child acquires the ability to perform logical actions, but he can perform these actions in tangible and objective things, not in hypothetical things. At this stage, unlike the previous stages, children can predict the actions and guess the results in advance. With the help of signs, they can classify and arrange different things, learn to read, calculate and write. Cognitive capacities at this stage of development allow the child to improve communication with others and become more social. He would find that others have different beliefs, interests, and mental backgrounds.

He can put himself in the place of others and understand their feelings. It is at this point that the child organizes his or her first independent conversations with others. For him, this kind of conversation is accompanied by an understanding of mutual communication. Also, for the first time, he is able to review the extent of his currents of thought (Qolipour, 1997: 106-105).

#### *Formal operation stage*

The formal operation phase covers from twelve to fifteen years old. During this period, the adolescent gradually acquires the ability to think in terms of contractual or hypothetical matters, especially in the field of scientific reasoning and inference, and formal rules. Therefore, adolescents are able at this stage to apply practical thinking based on hypothetical-deductive method. Thus, they can formulate a hypothesis and test their hypothesis without having to refer to tangible objects. At this stage, adolescents think about their thoughts and mindsets and can organize their thoughts in their minds, thus creating ideals for themselves and their future. Adolescents at this age can argue against thoughts and statements that are contrary to reality. (Qolipour, 1997: 105-106)

#### *The role of Tamer stories in the CLD of children and adolescents*

Fisher believes that the fantasy element in stories gives children the opportunity to think about real experiences through the experience of imagination (Fisher, 2003: 139). Stories stimulate the thinking and imagination of children and adolescents. And it can make children and adolescents think about different events in the story, seek solutions, put themselves in the position of the characters in the story, and make decisions in that situation.

A good story can motivate children and adolescents and increase their mental accuracy and concentration, so that they can apply what they have learned in real life. Each story conveys messages to the reader, and there are many messages in Tamer's stories that promote the CLD of children and adolescents. Some of Zakariyya Tamer's stories help children and adolescents to acquire social skills, because these stories help children understand how their behavior makes others feel.

### *Fascination of story theme*

The theme means the essence of everything and what is understood from words and phrases (Dad, 1996). The theme in the definition means the main and dominant thought of any literary work. In other words, the theme is defined as the dominant thought that the author applies in the story, and that is why it is said that the theme shows the author's thought and perception. (Mirsadeghi, 2006: 174). Traditional stories lack of some elements like attractive themes, but one of the characteristics of Tamer's stories is having an attractive theme because they must have interesting stories to tell. The theme of stories is like explosive material, despite the fact that these materials are small, but because it is placed in a small closed container, it creates a big explosion) (Jazini, 1999: 40). Short stories have an interesting theme to compensate shortcomings of the plot, and usually have an educational aspect in children and adolescents. For example, in the book "why did the river fall silent", Tamer teaches that freedom is a cure for pain and strength, and emphasizes vigilance against the enemy. In the story, he first selects a section of the story character and then narrates the best action and the most attractive moment; in fact, this would encourage to freedom and struggle to achieve the goal, and also shows the result of greed. So the author by including topics such as freedom, awareness of the enemy's cunning, respect to each other and avoidance of immorality (such as avoidance of greed, discord), and complete and decisive treatment with problems and issues that stem from the most common issues in life draws the reader's (children and adolescents) attention to issues that are sometimes not meditated on. Therefore, this feature of the story would possibly make emotional tension and present mental challenges, which tend to promote CLD in children and adolescents.

### **Conclusion**

Fascination of story theme allows children and adolescents to think about the events and understand the experiences. Tamer stories based on Piaget's theory would create emotional tension and present mental challenges, which tend to promote CLD in children and adolescents. Short stories written

by Tamer have interesting themes to compensate shortcomings of the plot, and usually have an educational aspect in children and adolescents such as struggle to achieve the goal, the result of greed, decisive treatment with problems and issues, and respect to each other and avoid from immorality (such as avoidance of greed, discord); thus, these features would possibly transmit to CLD of children and adolescents when they are expressed in intelligent way through fascinating theme.

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