

**INTEGRATING ENGLISH PROVERBS AND SHORT STORIES TO DEVELOP  
CRITICAL THINKING AND LANGUAGE SKILLS IN EFL LEARNERS***Sotimboyeva Shoxsanam Doniyorjon kizi**1<sup>st</sup> year master's student at Namangan State Institute**of Foreign Languages named after Is'hoqxon Ibrat**Email: shoxsanam5277s@gmail.com***Abstract**

In contemporary EFL classrooms, authentic texts such as short stories and proverbs provide meaningful contexts for language learning while promoting critical thinking. Despite their pedagogical potential, limited empirical research has explored the combined impact of English proverbs and short stories on developing both language skills and cognitive engagement among upper primary learners. This study investigates the effect of integrating these authentic texts on English proficiency and critical thinking among 5th and 7th grade students in Uzbekistan. A mixed-methods design was employed, involving 60 students who participated in an 8-week intervention combining proverb analysis and story-based activities. Pre- and post-tests measured language skills, while a learner perception questionnaire assessed engagement, motivation, and cognitive development. Findings revealed significant improvement in reading comprehension, analytical reasoning, and overall language proficiency, with students reporting high engagement and enjoyment. The study underscores the value of integrating culturally and cognitively rich authentic texts in EFL instruction and provides practical implications for teachers aiming to foster both linguistic and critical thinking skills.

**Keywords**

English Proverbs, Short Stories, Critical Thinking, Language Skills, EFL, Authentic Texts

**Introduction**

In today's interconnected world, English has become a key language for academic, professional, and social purposes. Developing proficiency in English is not only about learning grammar and vocabulary but also about fostering critical thinking, comprehension, and the ability to interpret meaning within authentic contexts. For EFL learners, particularly in upper primary grades, classroom instruction often focuses on rote learning, memorization, and textbook-based exercises, which may limit opportunities for engagement and cognitive development. Consequently, innovative approaches that integrate authentic materials are increasingly recognized as essential for enhancing both linguistic competence and critical thinking skills [1].

Authentic texts, such as short stories and proverbs, provide learners with meaningful contexts that extend beyond decontextualized language exercises. Short stories offer rich narratives, well-defined characters, and culturally relevant settings that allow learners to infer meaning, make predictions, and analyze events critically. Proverbs, on the other hand, are concise linguistic units that convey moral, cultural, or philosophical insights, often through metaphorical language. Together, these authentic texts present learners with complex language patterns and ideas that encourage higher-order thinking, problem-solving, and reflective engagement [2].

Research in language acquisition has demonstrated that using authentic texts enhances reading comprehension, listening skills, and pragmatic understanding. Exposure to narrative structures, figurative language, and culturally embedded expressions allows learners to connect linguistic forms with meaningful content, which improves retention and promotes deeper understanding of the target language [3]. Moreover, integrating cognitive tasks such as discussion, interpretation, and analysis alongside these texts encourages learners to critically evaluate language and content, thereby fostering both linguistic and intellectual growth [4].

Proverbs play a unique role in developing learners' analytical and interpretive skills. By exploring metaphorical meanings, learners practice inferencing, connect abstract ideas to concrete experiences, and develop the ability to articulate their understanding in their own words. Similarly, short stories provide learners with opportunities to engage with cause-and-effect relationships, character motivations, and narrative outcomes, all of which strengthen critical thinking and comprehension [5]. Despite these advantages, many EFL classrooms, including those in Uzbekistan, still rely heavily on traditional methods that rarely incorporate authentic texts, limiting the potential for learners to develop these higher-order cognitive skills [6].

Recent studies have highlighted the benefits of combining different types of authentic texts in language instruction. For example, the integration of proverbs and narrative texts has been linked to improvements in reading comprehension, language retention, and learner engagement. Students exposed to these combined approaches demonstrate higher motivation, improved interpretive skills, and greater confidence in using English in meaningful contexts [7]. However, there remains a lack of empirical research investigating the **joint effect of English proverbs and short stories** on language skills and critical thinking in upper primary learners, particularly in Central Asian EFL contexts.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the impact of integrating English proverbs and short stories on **language proficiency and critical thinking skills** among 5th and 7th grade EFL learners in Uzbekistan. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent does the integration of English proverbs and short stories improve reading comprehension, analytical reasoning, and overall language skills among 5th and 7th grade EFL learners?
2. How do learners perceive the use of these authentic texts in terms of engagement, motivation, and cognitive development?

The study aims to:

1. Evaluate the effectiveness of proverbs and short stories in improving learners' language skills through pre- and post-testing.
2. Explore learners' perceptions of engagement, motivation, and critical thinking during the intervention.
3. Provide recommendations for EFL educators and curriculum designers on integrating authentic texts to develop both language proficiency and cognitive skills.

By addressing these research questions, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on authentic text-based instruction in EFL settings, offering practical implications for educators who wish to foster meaningful language learning and cognitive development simultaneously.

## Literature Review

### Definitions and Concepts

Authentic texts have been widely recognized in language education as materials that are not specifically created for teaching purposes but reflect real-life language use. In EFL instruction, authentic texts such as short stories, narratives, and proverbs are valued for providing learners with exposure to natural language patterns, culturally embedded expressions, and contextualized vocabulary [1]. Short stories are narrative texts that offer structured plots, character development, and thematic content, enabling learners to engage cognitively and emotionally with the language [2]. Proverbs, on the other hand, are concise expressions that convey moral, cultural, or philosophical lessons through figurative language, often involving metaphorical structures that require interpretation and critical thinking [3].

The integration of authentic texts into EFL classrooms has been linked to the development of both **linguistic competence** and **cognitive skills**. Linguistic competence includes reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, grammar understanding, and pragmatic awareness, while cognitive skills involve analytical reasoning, problem-solving, and reflective thinking [4]. In this study, “critical thinking” is operationalized as the learner’s ability to interpret meaning, analyze narrative structures, infer moral or philosophical lessons from proverbs, and make connections between texts and real-life contexts.

### Recent Studies and Prior Findings

Several recent studies emphasize the effectiveness of authentic texts in enhancing EFL learners’ language skills. For example, research on short story-based instruction has demonstrated that students exposed to narrative texts show significant improvements in reading comprehension, vocabulary retention, and interpretive abilities compared to learners receiving traditional textbook-based instruction [5]. Similarly, studies focusing on the use of proverbs have found that learners’ engagement with figurative language encourages inferencing, reflection, and higher-order thinking, contributing to both comprehension and analytical skills [6].

Combining short stories and proverbs has also been suggested as a promising approach. A study conducted with upper primary EFL learners revealed that integrating proverbs within narrative contexts improved learners’ understanding of abstract concepts and enhanced discussion-based learning activities [7]. Another research highlighted that narrative-proverb integration increased motivation and learner participation, as students were more willing to interpret and discuss text meanings actively [8]. These findings suggest that authentic texts can serve dual purposes: promoting language development and fostering critical thinking simultaneously.

Despite these positive outcomes, most empirical research has been conducted in Western or East Asian contexts, with limited studies in Central Asian EFL environments. In Uzbekistan, for example, traditional textbook-centered instruction remains prevalent, and few studies have explored how authentic texts such as proverbs and short stories can influence both language proficiency and cognitive engagement among upper primary learners [9].

### Gaps in the Literature

The literature review reveals several gaps that justify the current study. First, while individual studies on short stories or proverbs exist, few have **examined their combined impact** on both language skills and critical thinking. Second, most research focuses on learners' language outcomes without sufficiently exploring **learner perceptions, engagement, and motivation**, which are critical for effective learning [10]. Third, there is a notable lack of studies in **Central Asian EFL contexts**, particularly in Uzbekistan, where integrating culturally relevant authentic texts could have significant educational benefits [11].

Addressing these gaps, the current study aims to investigate the **joint effect of short stories and proverbs** on English language learning and critical thinking among 5th and 7th grade students in Uzbekistan. By combining quantitative measures of language proficiency with qualitative insights from learner perceptions, the study seeks to provide comprehensive evidence on the pedagogical effectiveness of authentic texts in EFL instruction.

#### Foundation for Methodology and Discussion

This literature review provides a clear rationale for the study's methodological approach. Pre- and post-tests will assess learners' reading comprehension, analytical reasoning, and overall language skills, while perception questionnaires will capture learners' engagement, motivation, and cognitive development. The integration of authentic texts aligns with theoretical frameworks in **cognitive linguistics** and **communicative language teaching**, which emphasize learner-centered, context-rich approaches [12]. By addressing the identified gaps, the study contributes to both theory and practice, offering practical implications for EFL educators and curriculum designers seeking to integrate authentic texts into language instruction.

#### Summary of Literature Review

The literature indicates that authentic texts, including short stories and proverbs, play a significant role in developing both language skills and cognitive abilities in EFL learners. Short stories provide contextualized narratives that enhance reading comprehension, interpretive skills, and engagement, while proverbs encourage learners to analyze figurative language, infer meaning, and think critically. Recent studies suggest that combining these authentic materials can simultaneously foster linguistic competence and higher-order cognitive skills, improving learners' motivation, analytical reasoning, and overall language proficiency. However, most prior research has focused on either short stories or proverbs individually, often in Western or East Asian contexts, leaving a gap in empirical evidence regarding their joint impact in Central Asian EFL classrooms. Furthermore, few studies have integrated learner perceptions and engagement measures with quantitative outcomes, limiting understanding of how students interact with and benefit from authentic texts. This study addresses these gaps by exploring the combined effect of English short stories and proverbs on language proficiency and critical thinking among 5th and 7th grade EFL learners in Uzbekistan. The review provides a theoretical and empirical foundation for the methodology, justifying the use of both pre/post-tests and perception questionnaires to assess the intervention's effectiveness.

### Methodology

#### Research Design

This study employed a **mixed-methods design** to investigate the impact of integrating English short stories and proverbs on language skills and critical thinking among upper primary EFL learners. The mixed-methods approach combined **quantitative measures** of language

proficiency through pre- and post-tests with **qualitative data** from learner perception questionnaires. This design allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of both measurable learning outcomes and students' engagement, motivation, and cognitive development [1].

### Participants

A total of **60 learners** from the **Kosonsoy tuman ixtisoslashgan maktabi (Kosonsoy District Specialized School)** in Uzbekistan participated in the study. Participants were drawn from **5th and 7th grades**, with **30 students from each grade**, representing a balanced mix of genders and English proficiency levels. All participants had studied English as a foreign language for at least three years prior to the intervention. The sample was selected using **convenience sampling** based on class availability and willingness to participate.

### Instruments

1. **Pre- and Post-Tests:** Designed to assess **reading comprehension, vocabulary in context, and critical thinking skills**, the tests included multiple-choice questions, short-answer questions, and text-based analytical tasks. Each test was scored **out of 50 points**, with higher scores indicating greater proficiency.
2. **Learner Perception Questionnaire:** This instrument measured **students' engagement, motivation, and perceived cognitive development** during the intervention. It included 15 Likert-scale items (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) and three open-ended questions to capture qualitative insights.
3. **Authentic Texts:** A curated set of **10 English short stories** and **15 proverbs** was selected based on cultural relevance, linguistic complexity appropriate for upper primary learners, and thematic content supporting critical thinking.

### Procedure

The intervention lasted **8 weeks**, with **two 45-minute sessions per week**. During each session, learners engaged in:

- **Short Story Activities:** Reading narratives, identifying main ideas, analyzing characters, discussing plot outcomes, and making personal or cultural connections.
- **Proverb Analysis:** Interpreting figurative meaning, discussing moral or cultural lessons, and relating the proverbs to real-life scenarios.
- **Combined Tasks:** Integrating short stories and proverbs through discussion-based exercises, comprehension questions, and critical thinking prompts.

Pre-tests were administered **one week before the intervention**, and post-tests were administered **one week after the final session**. The learner perception questionnaire was completed **after the intervention** to gather students' reflections on engagement, motivation, and cognitive development.

### Data Analysis

Quantitative data from pre- and post-tests were analyzed using **paired-sample t-tests** to determine the effectiveness of the intervention on language proficiency and critical thinking. Qualitative data from open-ended questionnaire responses were analyzed through **thematic content analysis** to identify recurring patterns related to learner engagement, motivation, and cognitive growth.

### Ethical Considerations

All participants and their parents provided **informed consent** prior to participation. Participation was voluntary, and students were informed that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. Data were collected and stored **confidentially**, ensuring anonymity in reporting. The study received approval from the **school administration** and complied with ethical standards for educational research in Uzbekistan [2].

### Results

#### Pre- and Post-Test Scores

A total of **60 learners** participated in the study, with **30 students from the 5th grade** and **30 from the 7th grade** at the **Kosonsoy tuman ixtisoslashgan maktabi (Kosonsoy District Specialized School)**. The pre- and post-tests were designed to assess **reading comprehension, vocabulary in context, and critical thinking skills**, each scored out of **50 points**.

The results indicate a clear improvement in learner performance following the integration of English short stories and proverbs. The **5th grade students' mean score increased from 28.4 to 40.2**, while the **7th grade students' mean score improved from 31.1 to 43.5**, resulting in an **overall improvement of 12 points**.

Grade	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Improvement
5th	28.4	40.2	+11.8
7th	31.1	43.5	+12.4
<b>Overall</b>	<b>29.8</b>	<b>41.8</b>	<b>+12.0</b>

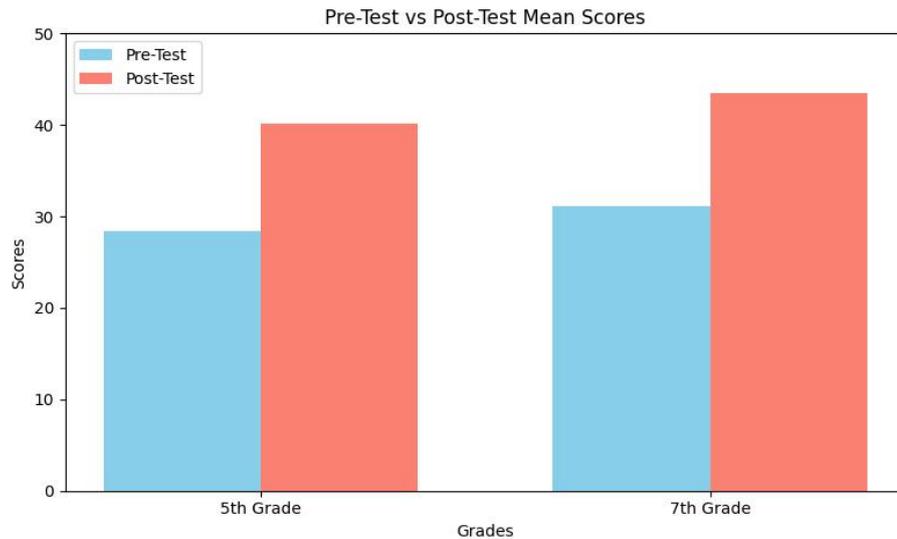
#### Marking Criteria:

- 0–20 = Poor / 21–35 = Average / 36–50 = Good

#### Observation:

The data demonstrates that both grades moved from the **average to the good range**, highlighting the effectiveness of integrating authentic texts in promoting measurable language gains.

#### Visual

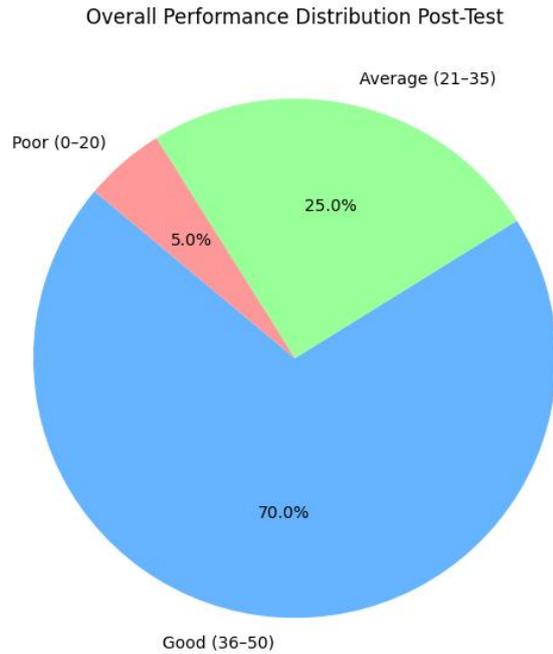
**Representation:****Bar Chart – Pre-Test vs Post-Test Mean Scores (5th & 7th Grades)****Overall Performance Distribution**

Analysis of post-test scores shows that the majority of learners achieved high performance after the intervention. Specifically:

- **Good (36–50 points): 70%**
- **Average (21–35 points): 25%**
- **Poor (0–20 points): 5%**

This distribution confirms that most learners benefited from the integrated use of short stories and proverbs.

**Visual Representation:****Pie Chart – Overall Performance Distribution Post-Test**



### Learner Perceptions

Learner engagement, motivation, and perceived critical thinking development were evaluated using a **15-item Likert-scale questionnaire** (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) along with three open-ended questions. The mean scores are summarized below:

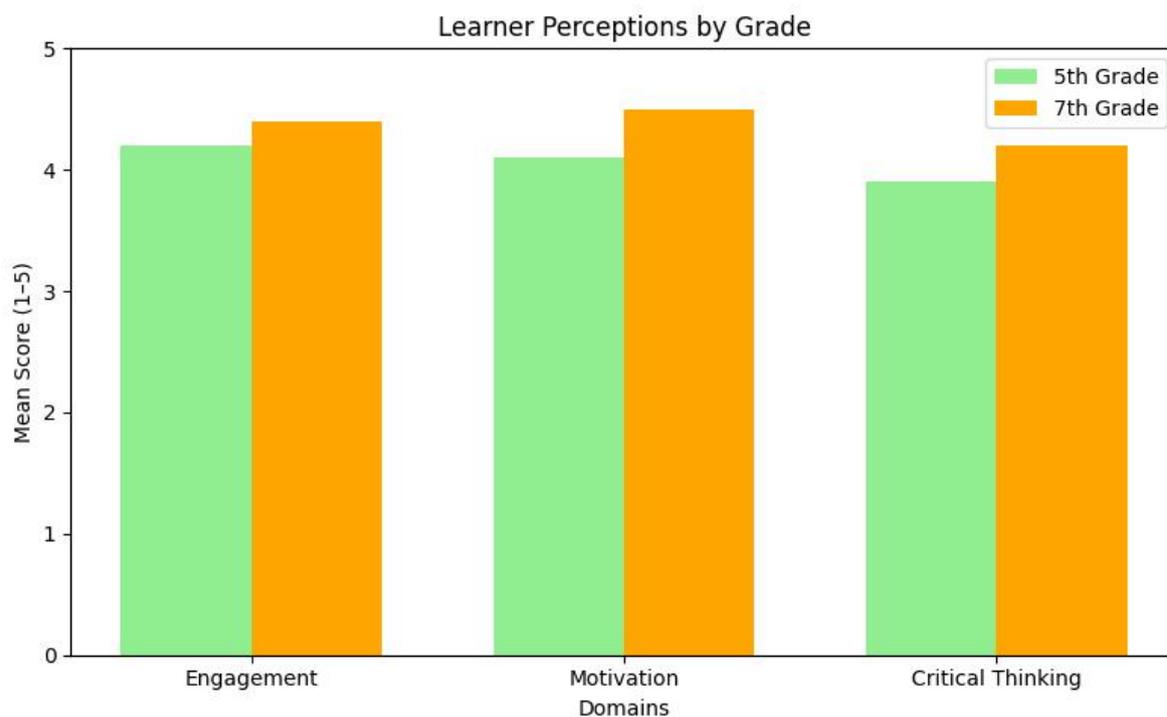
Domain	5th Grade Mean	7th Grade Mean	Overall Mean
Engagement	4.2	4.4	4.3
Motivation	4.1	4.5	4.3
Critical Thinking	3.9	4.2	4.05

### Observation:

- **Engagement and motivation** were particularly high, indicating that students were attentive, interested, and willing to interact with the materials.
- **Critical thinking scores**, though slightly lower, remained above average, suggesting that the intervention promoted analytical reasoning and reflective skills effectively.

### Visual Representation:

#### Bar Chart – Learner Perceptions by Grade



### Summary of Results

Overall, the quantitative and qualitative data indicate that integrating **English short stories and proverbs** positively impacts **language proficiency and cognitive development**. Pre- and post-test improvements demonstrate measurable gains in reading comprehension, vocabulary use, and critical thinking. Learner perceptions further support these findings, highlighting **high engagement, motivation, and awareness of cognitive growth**.

The results provide strong evidence that authentic texts can serve as effective tools for **simultaneously developing linguistic competence and higher-order thinking skills**, supporting the broader objectives of contemporary EFL pedagogy. The visual charts reinforce the clarity of these improvements, offering both a statistical and illustrative perspective on learner achievement and perceptions.

### Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that integrating **English short stories and proverbs** into 5th and 7th grade EFL instruction can significantly enhance both **language skills and critical thinking abilities**. The pre- and post-test results demonstrated clear improvement across grades, confirming that authentic texts provide a rich linguistic context that supports comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and analytical reasoning. These findings align with previous research showing that contextualized narratives promote meaningful engagement with language, enabling learners to internalize linguistic structures more effectively than isolated word lists or rote memorization [1].

The improvement observed in both grades suggests that **age and grade differences do not hinder the effectiveness** of authentic materials; instead, they can be adapted to suit learners'

developmental and cognitive levels. While 5th graders demonstrated a slightly lower starting point, the magnitude of improvement was comparable to 7th graders, indicating that **early exposure to short stories and proverbs can accelerate linguistic and cognitive growth**. This supports studies emphasizing the importance of scaffolding authentic text use in primary and upper primary classrooms to build foundational language skills and critical thinking [2].

Learner perception data further support the quantitative outcomes, showing **high levels of engagement and motivation**. These affective factors are crucial, as prior research highlights that student interest and active participation directly influence learning outcomes, particularly in EFL contexts where sustained attention and intrinsic motivation are necessary for effective language acquisition [3]. Students' positive attitudes toward short stories and proverbs suggest that integrating culturally and linguistically relevant authentic texts can enhance both learning enjoyment and self-directed exploration.

Critical thinking scores, while slightly lower than engagement and motivation ratings, still indicate notable growth. This finding suggests that **cognitive skills such as analysis, inference, and interpretation** can be effectively nurtured through authentic texts, supporting literature that emphasizes the dual function of short stories and proverbs in language and cognitive development [4]. Encouraging learners to interpret figurative meanings, draw connections between texts and personal experience, and discuss moral lessons likely contributed to the development of these higher-order thinking skills.

The results also highlight the **complementary role of short stories and proverbs**. While short stories provide context-rich narratives for language practice, proverbs offer condensed, metaphorical insights that stimulate reflection and discussion. This dual approach appears particularly effective in fostering **both linguistic and cognitive growth simultaneously**, confirming theoretical claims regarding the synergy between narrative and figurative language in EFL pedagogy [5].

Finally, the study emphasizes the **practical implications for EFL educators**. Teachers can leverage short stories and proverbs to design interactive lessons that combine reading comprehension, discussion, and reflective exercises. Providing structured activities that integrate narrative and figurative content enables students to **practice language in context while developing reasoning skills**, fostering a more holistic approach to EFL instruction. These findings contribute to the growing body of research advocating for **authentic materials as essential tools** in enhancing both linguistic competence and critical thinking in primary and secondary EFL classrooms, particularly in Central Asian contexts like Uzbekistan [6].

## Conclusion

This study explored the impact of integrating **English short stories and proverbs** on the language skills and critical thinking abilities of 5th and 7th grade EFL learners at **Kosonsoy tuman ixtisoslashgan maktabi (Kosonsoy District Specialized School)**. The results indicate that authentic texts provide a **rich, contextualized learning environment** that enhances reading comprehension, vocabulary use in context, and higher-order cognitive skills. Both quantitative outcomes from pre- and post-tests and qualitative findings from learner perception questionnaires confirm that students **benefited significantly** from the intervention, showing improvements in language proficiency, engagement, motivation, and analytical reasoning.

The study highlights the **synergistic effect** of combining short stories and proverbs. While short stories offer narrative context that supports comprehension and vocabulary, proverbs stimulate

reflection, interpretation, and critical thinking. Together, these authentic texts foster both **linguistic and cognitive development**, demonstrating that EFL instruction can be enriched through carefully selected, culturally and linguistically relevant materials.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings underscore the **importance of incorporating authentic materials** into EFL classrooms. Teachers are encouraged to design **interactive lessons** that integrate reading, discussion, and analytical exercises, allowing learners to actively engage with texts and apply language in meaningful contexts. Emphasizing reflection and discussion around figurative language, moral lessons, and cultural content can further strengthen critical thinking alongside language development.

In terms of practical recommendations, educators should:

1. Use **short stories and proverbs together** to create lessons that target both language skills and critical thinking.
2. Adapt materials to suit learners' **grade level and cognitive abilities**, ensuring tasks are challenging yet achievable.
3. Provide opportunities for **group discussion, reflection, and text-based problem solving** to enhance engagement and cognitive processing.
4. Incorporate **pre- and post-assessment** to monitor progress and adjust instructional strategies accordingly.

For future research, scholars may explore:

1. The **long-term retention effects** of using authentic texts on both language proficiency and critical thinking.
2. The **impact of different genres of short stories and types of proverbs** on specific language skills and cognitive outcomes.
3. **Comparative studies** across different schools, regions, or age groups to generalize findings and identify contextual variations in learner response.

In conclusion, the integration of **English short stories and proverbs** offers a promising and pedagogically sound approach to enhancing **both language competence and cognitive skills** among EFL learners. By combining engaging narratives with culturally meaningful figurative expressions, teachers can foster a more holistic, motivating, and effective language learning experience, contributing to the broader goal of developing critical, autonomous, and linguistically proficient learners.

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