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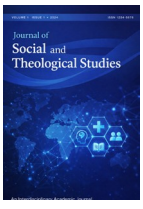

# HOW READING FOREIGN LITERARY WORKS FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING CONTRIBUTES TO LEARNERS' PERSONAL GROWTH

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**Abstract.** *This article discusses how, during the process of learning foreign languages, reading literary works written in the target language not only fosters the development of learners' linguistic competence but also influences their moral and psychological upbringing through the content and essence of these works.*

***Keywords:*** *concept, cultural literacy, intercultural education, game pedagogical concept, adequate perception, bicultural education, content, procedural, semantic, perceptual, visual, romanticism, realism, naturalism, neo-romanticism, aesthetics.*

## INTRODUCTION

Between the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the sociocultural context for learning foreign languages—categorized as languages of international communication—began to change significantly in Uzbekistan. The country's gradual transition from a closed society to an open one fostered the development of international cooperation, not only at the state level but also on an individual scale; this shift profoundly influenced the social status of foreign languages as academic subjects. Citizens of Uzbekistan were faced with the urgent need to acquire a language of international communication, as the inability to speak a foreign language fluently effectively restricted their access to the information and various other benefits offered by an open society. As part of the

implementation of sweeping reforms across all sectors in Uzbekistan—including the field of education—educational institutions have been tasked with significantly updating the content and methodologies used for teaching foreign languages. Currently, various pedagogical concepts related to the theory and practice of foreign language instruction are rapidly evolving in many countries around the world. These concepts, which share a common essence, are centered on the idea of educating students by fostering a deep familiarity with the cultures of the countries and peoples whose languages are being studied. Examples of such approaches—developed by various research institutions—include the concepts of "cultural literacy" and "intercultural education" (interkulturelles Concept/interkultureller Ansatz), as well as frameworks integrating linguistics with regional studies (area studies). The objectives of foreign language instruction include "the formation and subsequent dynamic development of a multifunctional sociocultural competence" (Safonova, 1998:29). This entails enabling an individual to engage in communication across diverse cultures and civilizations—adhering to the communicative norms associated with them—and transforming knowledge of cultural facts (including the culture of speech) into practical skills, by utilizing the functions of the language that hold personal and professional significance. A cultural approach to foreign language teaching can significantly enhance the educational value of this subject.

When direct contact with the culture associated with a foreign language is not possible, reading works written in that language serves as the most effective method for studying the target culture. Adequately perceiving and comprehending information requires highly developed skills in the receptive aspects of language activity; at the same time, it is clear that not all school graduates will have the opportunity to visit the countries where the language they are studying is spoken. Therefore, seeking ways to enhance the effectiveness of teaching reading is a pressing matter.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In the modern world, as intercultural dialogue continuously expands and deepens, the globalization of bicultural education—facilitated through foreign language learning—necessitates comprehensive reform. In line with UNESCO recommendations and taking into account the sociocultural characteristics of the target language, intercultural

dialogue must be conducted in a spirit of peace, respect for human rights, and humanism.

According to many methodologists (J.L. Vitlin 1993, 1996; E.I. Passov 1991, 1993; V.V. Safonova and N.G. Solovyova 1997; V.P. Furmanova 1992, 1994; I.I. Khaleeva 1989; and others), the following aspects—linguistic, cultural, sociolinguistic, and communicative-pragmatic—are considered essential components of language instruction in the 21st century (Prokhorets, 2001).

At the current stage of societal development, the importance of reading is growing. Due to scientific and technological progress and the expansion of international relations, the volume of information available in various languages is constantly increasing. There is a rising demand for specialists who know how to process this information and apply it for various purposes; consequently, there is an growing need to acquire specific, targeted knowledge. To foster an interest in reading, one should begin with general, accessible works; only after the habit of reading has been established is it advisable to move on to texts related to one's chosen profession or field of study.

It is worth noting that, although the technique of using literary works in foreign language instruction has long existed, it is currently underutilized by educators; instead, there is an intensive reliance on teaching materials developed by various publishing houses. While these intensive textbooks certainly accelerate the language-learning process, we as educators bear a broader responsibility: we must foster not only the student's knowledge but also their worldview, psychological resilience, and aesthetic sensibilities. Students often acquire these positive traits by emulating characters they come to view as ideals. Introducing such characters to students through literature offers a twofold benefit: it cultivates a culture of reading, encourages students to analyze the events within a work through the lens of their own worldview—thereby developing their ability to form and express personal perspectives—and, ultimately, serves the primary objective of enhancing language proficiency. Unfortunately, teachers, psychologists, and methodologists observe that the reading of literary works is becoming increasingly rare among students in the upper grades.

Currently, the "Guess What" and "Prepare" textbooks—selected for teaching English in schools of Uzbekistan—do not include any works of fiction or texts about prominent English-language authors. It is possible that in the countries where these textbooks were developed, literature is taught as a separate subject, which may explain

why it is not emphasized here. However, incorporating a culture's folklore, traditional tales, and notable literary works into foreign language instruction helps students develop more than just communication skills; it fosters the ability to think and reason in the target language, while also enabling them to grasp the aesthetic sensibilities and emotional landscape of that culture. Unfortunately, at present, literature does not hold a significant place in the process of teaching foreign languages. Whether in general secondary schools or in specialized language courses, original literary texts—including those intended for young readers—are used only to a very limited extent. Furthermore, the content of the literary texts that are included is often poorly aligned with both the students' age-appropriate interests and the specific themes covered in the lessons. Currently, while the inclusion of more excerpts from contemporary English fiction in local educational-methodological materials could boost young people's interest in literature, resources that guide them toward works suited to their specific language proficiency and personal interests are either unavailable or not widely implemented. Consequently, students struggle to select books for independent reading, and an ill-chosen text can dampen their overall interest in reading. Furthermore, the vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and sentence structures that students encounter through independent reading are rarely integrated or revisited during classroom instruction. As a result, the cultural-linguistic competence developed by students fails to foster the enthusiasm, ability, or skills necessary for them to engage with foreign-language literature independently in the future. Scholars such as G.I.Bogin (1984), Yu.N.Karaulov (1987), I.I. Khaleeva (1989), and V.P. Furmanova (1994) have addressed the issue of levels of personal language competence in their academic works, defining the stages of a "cultural and linguistic personality" for foreign language educators (Prokhorets, 2001). However, neither in domestic nor in foreign academic literature have we encountered research specifically focused on the development of a "cultural and linguistic personality" in secondary school students (grades 10–11) as they learn to read literary works in a foreign language. In this context, a question arises: what level of "cultural and linguistic personality" development must a student attain to be able to read foreign-language literature independently, and what specific competencies must be cultivated to achieve this? Special programs have been developed for those aiming to achieve a perfect command of a foreign language. However, the development of sociocultural and intercultural competencies—through the reading of literary works

during the foreign language learning process—does not, in itself, ensure a targeted enhancement of the levels at which a learner’s cultural and linguistic identity is cultivated.

The process of reading a literary work involves two levels: the substantive (the semantic components of the activity's content) and the procedural (the elements of the activity's process). The content of the activity encompasses the outcome directed toward achieving a specific goal—namely, the comprehension of a linguistic work presented in written form by uncovering its semantic connections. The nature of the reading process shifts depending on the specific objective of the reading. In any given instance, the reader engages in a variety of operations and actions—linked to the specific reading task—that involve the semantic and perceptual processing of the perceived material. The act of reading always manifests in a particular form, which (for an experienced reader) represents the most efficient combination of operations for the semantic and perceptual processing of visually perceived material. According to S.K. Folomkina, "a specific configuration of operations, determined by the goal of the reading, is referred to as a 'type of reading'" (Folomkina, 1982:26).

While readers engaging with a literary work are often interested in the types of communicative competencies applicable to real-life situations rather than in moral instruction, the primary objective of many educators is to use such works to influence the reader’s personal development. Numerous English-language literary works serve this purpose. Many books that offer positive moral influence—while simultaneously captivating readers through their plots and events—were written by authors from the 19th and 20th centuries, including George Gordon Byron, Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, the Bronte sisters, Elizabeth Gaskell, George Eliot, Robert Louis Stevenson, Arthur Conan Doyle, Oscar Wilde, Rudyard Kipling, William Morris, Mark Twain, Jack London, Theodore Dreiser, O. Henry, J.K. Rowling, J.R.R. Tolkien, Agatha Christie, Ernest Hemingway, and others. These authors represent various movements in the development of English literature, such as Romanticism, Realism, Naturalism, Neo-Romanticism, and Aestheticism.

The works of the aforementioned authors align well with the psychology and interests of today’s youth; furthermore, the idiomatic expressions, specific terminology, and names of objects found in these texts are actively used by contemporary English speakers. The role of literature in the development of a well-rounded individual has

been extensively studied by philologists and methodologists. Reading literary texts enriches a person spiritually and enables a better perception of the world around them. Literary texts in a foreign language serve as a tool for language instruction while simultaneously broadening students' worldviews and providing insight into the cultures of other peoples. Exploring the culture of another nation through its language is one of the most significant aspects of intercultural dialogue in the modern world. A “cultured” reader is an individual who is polite, well-mannered, capable of understanding and empathizing with the feelings of others, and able to engage in meaningful conversation on a wide range of topics. When selecting literary works for students' independent reading, it is essential to consider their psychological characteristics, language proficiency, and personal interests. By reading works created during the 19th and 20th centuries, students gain the opportunity to observe the bravery of characters from those eras—how they courageously overcame the trials imposed by fate, looked toward the future with hope, and maintained a pure, sincere spirit. Furthermore, it is important to note that many works from that period depict conditions quite the opposite of today’s prosperity; reading them fosters a sense of gratitude in students, leading them to appreciate the peace, tranquility, and abundance they enjoy in the present day. Numerous literary works can serve as examples of this.

Ernest Hemingway’s “The Old Man and the Sea”—a work cherished by many book lovers—serves as an inspiring example not only for school-aged readers but also for adults, offering guidance on how to overcome various life challenges. We will examine several sentences from the text and analyze how they contribute to personal development and character building (Hemingway, 1995; Bookroo, n.d.).

1. “No one should be alone in their old age, he thought.” Through this line, the author presents being left alone in old age as a catastrophic event in a person’s life.

2. “Everything about him was old except his eyes, and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated.” In this passage, the author conveys that, despite the protagonist having endured severe trials throughout his life, a spark of hope —and the expectation of triumph over these hardships—still remains in his eyes.

3. “Most people were heartless about turtles because a turtle’s heart will beat for hours after it has been cut up and butchered. But the old man thought, I have such a heart too.” Through these sentences, the author illustrates the protagonist’s resilience and his tenacity—his refusal to give up easily—by drawing a parallel to the heart of a turtle.

4. “You did not kill the fish only to keep alive and to sell for food, he thought. You killed him for pride and because you are a fisherman. You loved him when he was alive and you loved him after. If you love him, it is not a sin to kill him. Or is it more?” These lines express a person’s love and dedication toward their profession, as well as a deep affection for the fish that serve as their means of livelihood.

5. “I may not be as strong as I think, but I know many tricks and I have resolution.” Upon reading these lines, a reader might be reminded of the Uzbek proverb: “Strength does not lie in physical power, but in the intellect.” Through this passage, one can grasp the true essence of the matter.

6. “But man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not defeated.” It emphasizes the strength of human pride—while one’s body may be hacked to pieces; one’s spirit cannot be extinguished.

Readers of this work will feel a sense of compassion for the protagonist, while also being struck by the character’s fortitude in overcoming every hardship encountered in the struggle for life. Perhaps the most significant educational aspect of the work is its portrayal of loneliness—showing that, for a human being, solitude can be more painful than any other affliction.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that a well-chosen book—appropriate for any age—not only enhances a reader’s knowledge of a subject or language skills but also shapes their perspective on the world around them. Furthermore, it influences the nature and substance of their interactions with parents, loved ones, and classmates. Vocabulary acquired through reading literary works is retained more firmly in the memory, as these words or phrases are encountered in the context of being spoken by a character, or used to describe a specific event, object, or individual within the narrative.

Incorporating excerpts from literary works—which contribute to both the intellectual and moral development of students—into future foreign language textbooks for schools will foster a greater interest in these works among students. Furthermore, it is essential to establish extracurricular clubs for reading literature in a foreign language and to enrich school libraries with literary texts—appropriate for school-aged students—that correspond to the A2, B1, and B2 proficiency levels.

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