

EEIA-2017
2017 International conference
"Education Environment for the Information Age"

**LANGUAGE AND LITERARY LITERACY AS COMPONENTS OF
LEARNER'S FUNCTIONAL LITERACY**

Olga M. Aleksandrova (a), Maria A. Aristova (b), Irina N. Dobrotina (c) *,
Yulia N. Gosteva (d), Irina P. Vasilevyh (e)

*Corresponding author

- (a) Ph.D. (Education), Senior Researcher, Institute for Strategy of Education Development of the Russian Academy of Education, Makarenko str, 5/16, Moscow, Russia
- (b) Ph.D. (Education), Senior Researcher, Institute for Strategy of Education Development of the Russian Academy of Education, Makarenko str, 5/16, Moscow, Russia
- (c) Ph.D. (Education), Head of the center of philological education, Institute for Strategy of Education Development of the Russian Academy of Education, Makarenko str, 5/16, Moscow, Russia, +7(495) 621-3374, irlenal@yandex.ru*
- (d) Ph.D. (Education), Senior Researcher, Institute for Strategy of Education Development of the Russian Academy of Education, Makarenko str, 5/16, Moscow, Russia
- (e) Researcher, Institute for Strategy of Education Development of the Russian Academy of Education, Makarenko str, 5/16, Moscow, Russia

Abstract

The processes of globalization typical to the post-industrial era challenge a new consideration of literacy that satisfies the expectations of an individual and society. The article discusses various interpretations of the concepts of "language literacy", "literary literacy", and adduces their definitions as the subject-specific components of the functional literacy of schoolchildren. At different times the concept of language literacy meant the ability to read, mastery of spelling and punctuation rules. Such understanding does not fully meet the existing theories of functional literacy and cultural identity. The reading of works of art is the most important indicator of the culture of any national community, and a means of storing and transferring the most significant cultural codes. This kind of activity requires special competences and skills, and a specific type of literacy, which can be defined as literary literacy, the type which the authors consider as an integral part of reading literacy.

© 2017 Published by Future Academy www.FutureAcademy.org.UK

Keywords: Functional literacy, reading literacy, information and cultural codes, language literacy, literary literacy.



1. Introduction

Global processes that characterize the transition to the post-industrial era have posed the problems regarding a new understanding of literacy that meet the needs of the individual, society and the state. "The basis of the progressive development of every country and of mankind as a whole is the Man himself ... his moral position, his culture, education, professional competence" (Novikov, 2008). Since the 1950s, the issue of literacy has been considered at the international level, UNESCO documents proposed a uniform definition of the level of elementary literacy (a set of skills that include reading and writing which are used in a social context). However, by the end of the century, the need to expand this traditional understanding and to pay greater attention to functional literacy (FL) has become more evident. A modern interpretation of this term is given in the declaration of "The United Nations Literacy Decade", which emphasizes that

"literacy is the prerequisite for a healthy, just and prosperous world. <...> This is functional literacy, as opposed to basic literacy, the skills, including life skills, beyond the ability to read and to write that people need to meet the requirements of daily life" (The United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012), 2004).

2. Problem Statement

Research on the contents of the concept of literacy reflects the changes that occur both in social development and in scientific knowledge. While there is no doubt that the development of functional literacy of schoolchildren is an absolute must now, the problems connected with defining the boundaries and the content of the concept, identifying the components of the FL, developing its didactic support at different levels of education are debatable and are to be resolved. This proves our research to be of great *relevance*.

In the history of the analysis of this problem both in Russia and abroad there have been different approaches to the definition of literacy: literacy of speech and speech activity (spelling, punctuation); literacy connected with knowledge in a particular field (computer, mathematical, musical, environmental); literacy associated with general education and human development (intellectual, ethical, ethical, linguistic, etc.) (Plyusnina, 2004). International studies devoted to the assessment of the level of FL of schoolchildren from around the world identify some of its components, for example, mathematical, natural-science, and reading literacy (PISA).

3. Research Questions

At present time, however, a whole range of concepts connected with functional literacy and its main components cannot be considered as fully adopted by the worldwide scientific community. We proceed from the idea, which was proposed by N.F. Vinogradova, academician of the Russian Academy of Education, that the components of FL should be differentiated according to their role in the process of its use: *integrative* (communication, information, reading literacy) and *subject-specific* (mathematical, natural science, social literacy, etc.). The question of our research is to define what concepts we recognize to be the subject-specific components of functional literacy: *language* and *literary literacy*. We propose

and give reasons for the characterization of these terms in the light of the strategic objectives of modern language and literary education in school.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is seen in determining the core of the concept for the two of the main functional literacies – the language literacy and the literary literacy and their interrelation with the cultural aspect of education.

5. Research Methods

The methods used during this study include qualitative analysis of state regulations in the field of education, of the results of international studies PISA and PIRLS as well as the findings of the Russian and foreign researchers in the field of functional literacy and teaching methods in languages and literature training.

6. Findings

6.1. Language literacy

The question of determining the core of the concept of language literacy has been discussed in the works of Russian and foreign researchers. Attempts were made to define the language literacy as a part of functional literacy, which reflects "the optimal level of language and speech development for primary education, provided by cognitive, communicative, value-semantic, information and personal competence" (Chipysheva, 2008). The tendency to move away from the traditional understanding of language literacy and link it to the functional one should be recognized as justifiable and reflecting the needs of our time.

It should be noted that the questions of the development of spelling and punctuation literacy were directly connected with the concept of a "unified verbal and spelling mode" in secondary school for a very long time. It is "a strictly defined range of requirements of general literacy and oral and written speech culture of students, which all the teachers should strive for fulfilling" (Tekuchev, 1980). However, the very concept of "unified" carries an understanding of a meta-subject role of the language component of functional literacy. This aspect is still relevant today, since it is spelling and punctuation literacy that is "one of the most important parts that forms a cultivated, literate personality" (Malyavina, 2011).

In the Western education system, the notion of "academic literacy" is widely used. It helps to determine the level of students' or learners' readiness for academic activity (Green, 1999). The word "academic" is used to describe the learning progress of students (academic progress), the rise on the educational scale (academic development), scientific achievements (academic achievements). The set of skills that determine academic literacy is usually the following: Academic Reading - the ability to find, evaluate information and analyze what has been read; Academic Listening - the ability to listen to reports, speeches and lectures, highlighting the main ideas; Academic Speaking - the ability to make a speech, to articulate your thoughts in a consistent and convincing manner; Academic Writing - the ability to build hypotheses, draw conclusions, organize and structure your own text. There are manuals devoted to the

development of academic language skills (for example, academic writing courses by Oshima, & Hogue (2006), Jordan, R.R. (Jordan, 1999), Morley, J. (Morley, Doyle, & Pople, 2007, etc.).

According to these principles it should be determined that academic literacy includes three aspects: operational literacy – the language (especially writing) competence; cultural literacy – understanding of the discourse and culture (the ability to communicate in the language of a particular group of people or an object – the language of economics, scientific language, etc.); critical literacy – understanding of how knowledge is created and can be transformed (the ability to understand what is meant or implied by the author of the written text). It is the perspective of the Russian researchers (Vasilyevikh, & Gosteva, 2016). However, there is another, more narrow, understanding of this notion: as “activities with language units, finding of synonyms, negotiation of the same meaning with the help of different language patterns, composition of a proper answer to the question, compression or enlargement of language patterns” (Drozdova, 2017).

It should also be taken into account that in the age of rapid development of information systems, the study of languages can be supported by various technologies.

"Language and technology can be well integrated to multiply students' linguistic, educational, and social advantages. The key element in this is not necessarily the number of computers in the classroom but rather how they are best used to amplify students' own individual and collective resources. These resources include their own sense of identity, their values and history as members of a community, and their desire to cross cultures to make their views known and to learn from others" (Warschauer, 2004).

Based on the conducted research regarding the definition of the notion of "language literacy", it has been concluded that the verbal and cogitative (cognitive) abilities are the main indicators of the learner's language literacy. This finding is due to the laws of cognitive linguistics and psychology, according to which language is seen as a cognitive process realized through communication activities and provided for by special cognitive structures and mechanisms in the human brain (Regularities in the formation of the content of philological Education in modern society, 2014).

Thus, the language component of functional literacy is connected with the development of cognitive abilities in the process of teaching the Russian language: mastering the skills of recognizing, analyzing, classifying linguistic facts, evaluating them in terms of normativity; distinguishing between functional varieties of the language and simulating speech behavior in accordance with communicative goals. The framework of language literacy is universal cognitive (logical) skills, acquisition of the conceptual and terminological systems of the Russian language, mastery of speech activity in all its manifestations.

6.2. Literary literacy

Reading of the works of art is the most important indicator of the culture of any national community, and a means of storing and transferring the most significant cultural codes. This kind of activity requires special competences and skills, and a specific type of literacy which can be defined as literary literacy. It correlates with a number of notions related to functional literacy which are already accepted by the international scientific community.

First of all, it is the term reading literacy that is defined in the PISA research as follows: "it is the ability to read, understand, use, and reflect on written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society" (*Key findings of global survey PISA-2015* (2015)). We understand literary literacy as a subject-specific component in the structure of an integrative one - reading literacy. The need to single out literary literacy in this scheme is justified by the following.

In international research connected with the study and evaluation of the reading abilities of schoolchildren (PISA, PIRLS, NAEP, IEARLS), literary texts are either not singled out (according to PISA, they belong to the category of "narrative" texts and make up no more than 15%) or there are no special assignments of measuring the difference in reading of factual and fictional texts (PIRLS assesses the reading of literary texts from the perspective of the literary experience and the acquisition/use of information). We can therefore conclude that a literary work proper as functional literacy in general and reading literacy in particular is yet to seek attention of the researchers.

However, literary works are the basis not only of any national literature curriculum in school and at the university, but also of leisure reading of an educated, civilized part of the society. We should emphasize that, according to most scientists, the reading of art works – works by modern writers as well as writes of the past centuries – is the most significant factor of cultural development of individuals and society as a whole, without which society and the state cannot move forward in almost all spheres of their functioning. This demonstrates that it is literary literacy that should necessarily be the object of a special study.

Reading literacy as well as literary literacy includes an important component – content reading.

"The process of conscious reading of a text depends on the knowledge of its particular features, on an ability to compare them with those that are present in the written text one is to analyze. If children do not know the specific features of different types of texts, they are not able to analyze and evaluate them" (Vinogradova, Kochurova, Kuznetsova, Romanova, Rydze, Homyakova, 2016).

Cultural literacy is another notion that correlates with the concept of literary literacy. It is not widely used in this country yet, but is firmly established in the foreign scientific discourse. According to the author of the theory of cultural literacy, the American scholar and educator Hirsch. E.D. Jr., *"the principle of cultural literacy is implicitly international"* (Hirsh, Kett, Trefil, 2002). In "The Dictionary of Cultural Literacy" compiled on the basis of this theory, the scholar offers a definition:

"Cultural literacy, unlike expert knowledge, is meant to be shared by everyone. It is that shifting body of information that our culture has found useful, and therefore worth preserving. <...> This shared information is the foundation of our public discourse. <...> Cultural literacy is the context of what we say and read" (Hirsh, Kett, Trefil, 1988). Being a professor, Hirsch. E.D. lays special emphasis on learning and reading, understanding this activity as *"not simply acts of decoding and encoding but rather acts of communication. <...> Since successful learning from reading depends on the effectiveness of the communicative transaction, I am led to the conclusion that both learning and reading are powerfully affected by the degree to which background knowledge is shared between writer and reader, and between teacher and student"* (Hirsh, Kett, Trefil, 2002). According to the scholar, teaching of this kind of "reading with comprehension" forms the "true literacy".

Taking into consideration what has been stated we should acknowledge that cultural literacy is a wider term compared to literary literacy, although it does not reflect a number of aspects which we

believe to be significant for literary literacy. Therefore, the two concepts are not identical. It should be mentioned, however, that cultural literacy is fundamentally important for the effective development of learners' literary literacy.

"Literary-based approach" to teaching foreign languages proposed by the British scientist and pedagogue Kern. R. also correlates with the literary literacy (Kern, 2000). It is in the works of this researcher that the terminological use of the concept of "literary literacy" is recorded. But here it is used in another area - teaching foreign languages - and presupposes another content. According to Kern, literacy must be defined on the basis of a socio-cultural understanding which "stresses the importance of interpretation, collaboration, cultural conventions, cultural knowledge, problem solving, reflection and self-reflection, and language use" (Min Wang, 2015). Following the direction laid by Kern, a number of modern scholars refine the notion of literacy (Gee, 2012; Lam, 2009).

Thus, we can conclude that in modern studies the terminological meaning of the concept of literary literacy as a subject component of the schoolchildren's functional literacy is still not defined.

Based on research, we propose the following definition of the term. "Literary literacy is a person's ability to understand and use literary works for the purposes of moral and cultural self-enrichment, to reflect upon them and engage in reading in order to gain aesthetic pleasure, expand their knowledge and abilities, to participate in social and cultural life" (Aristova, 2017).

Literary literacy, which is first and foremost formed by the school, includes the following:

- understanding of the meaning of the work as the result of the author's (forms all the elements of the content and the structure of the work) and the reader's activity (perception and empathy, analysis, interpretation and reflection);
- the achievement of the level of aesthetically literate reading which depends on the knowledge of the specific features of this or that literary form and the writer's artistic world;
- knowledge and understanding of the historical and cultural context of the work (on the basis of the development of cultural competence) and the ability to build links with this context (intratextual and intertextual);
- acquisition of a particular form of interpretative activity realized as a creative dialogue with the author - "co-creativity of those who understand" as it is defined by the culturologist Bakhtin, M.M. (Bakhtin, 1979). It is "dialogical communication with the author modern learners should try and join despite being separated by ages" (Aristova, Berdysheva, Strizhekurova, 2016). Whether this dialogue is full, profound and successful depends both on the specific features of the work, and on the reader's competence, his background knowledge or "horizon of expectations" (the concept in Reception Aesthetics) (Jauss, 1982).

It should be pointed out that to identify, understand and interpret the intertext of the works of art one should have the ability to work not only with additional reference materials, but also with information retrieval systems, information databases. Therefore, it provides for the formation and development of another component of functional literacy of the modern person - information literacy. However, the development of the skills, necessary to build the contextual links in the work, is related to the competencies which are crucial in the modern globalized world – competencies in the field of intercultural dialogue: "an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals, groups with

different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage on the basis of mutual understanding and respect” (White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, 2008).

7. Discussion

The results of the research were discussed and approved of at the International and All-Russian conferences:

- Interregional methodology workshop “The Academy of Reading”, March 23-24, Chelyabinsk Institute of Retraining and Improvement of Professional Skill of Educators, Chelyabinsk: Dobrotina, I.N., a report: “The development of reading literacy at Russian language lessons”;
- III International scientific and practical conference “Current problems of psychology and pedagogy”, April 6-7, 2017, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Moscow: Aristova, M.A., a report: «Cultural competence and reading literacy of literary school education»;
- The 9th International theoretical and practical conference “e-Kazan 2017” (information technologies in modern world), April 25-26, 2017, Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities, Kazan Federal University, Kazan: Aristova, M.A., a report: “The relationship of literary literacy and media literacy of pupils in conditions of modern informational educational environment”
- VIII All-Russian scientific and practical conference «Integration of technology in the teaching of philological disciplines”, April 20-21, 2017, State Pedagogical University of Nizhny Novgorod “Minin University”, Nizhny Novgorod: Aristova, M.A., a plenary report “The problem of correlation between literary competence and reading literacy in teaching literature at school”

The current results of the research have also been presented and approved of at the meeting in the Institute for Strategy of Education Development of the Russian Academy of Education, which was devoted to the discussion of the implementation of the state assignment “Didactic support of the development of pupils’ functional literacy in modern conditions”, March 9th, 2017. The keynote report was made by Vinogradova, N.F., the Head of the Theme, as well as the designers of the subject-specific components: Aleksandrova, O.M., Gosteva, Yu.N., Dobrotina, I.N.– language literacy; Aristova, M.A.– literary literacy.

8. Conclusion

This research has allowed us to determine the approaches to the identification of the subject-specific components of the functional literacy of a learner, which is a crucial issue for modern educational process and society as a whole. The parameters according to which language and literary literacy can be correlated with the accepted terms of functional literacy have been proposed. It provides for a better understanding of the specific features of these terms and their field of use.

In the modern post-industrial society, the number of information codes used in the process of communication is constantly increasing, the development of a person is influenced by processes which occur both in real world and in virtual space, the semantic load of the known concepts is changing. This

provides for a significant contribution of language and literary literacy to the development of functional literacy.

At the same time, scientists, teachers, public and state figures around the world acknowledge with great concern the systemic loss of the speech culture and the interest in reading fiction (large and average volume straight texts), which is widely observed among adults and young people. There are concerns expressed about the loss of the basic ability to read and understand such texts. The information environment rapidly replaces these skills with the new ones connected with the ability to process large flows of information, to work with computer, multimedia and web-based technologies.

It shows that research on functional literacy in general and components like language and literary literacy in particular should be continued. The issue of determining the core of these concepts is to be solved in the practice of the world, as well as Russian education, since "teachers in all subject areas are faced with new challenges in enabling learners' academic language development of learners without losing focus on content" (Achugar, Schleppegrell, Oteiza, 2007).

The work has been done within the framework of the State Assignment of the Institute for Strategy of Education Development of the Russian Academy of Education (No. 27.7948.2017 / BCH).

References

- Achugar, M., Schleppegrell, M. J., & Oteiza, T. (2007). *Engaging teachers in language analysis*.
- Aristova, M.A. (2017). *The relationship of literary literacy and media literacy of pupils in conditions of modern informational educational environment*. Transactions ISSH (Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities). Vol. 1(15), Kazan: Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities, 37-42. [in Rus].
- Aristova, M.A., Berdysheva, L.R., Strizhekurova, Zh.I. (2016). *Theoretical basis of optimization of the educational-methodical complex on Literature in the conditions of modern school Informatization*. Materials from International Conference "Education Environment for the Information Age" (EEIA-2016), Web of Conferences, vol. 29, publ. by ISED RAE, Center of Philological Education, Moscow, Russia. DOI. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20162901005>.
- Bakhtin, M.M (1979). *Iz zapisei 1970-1971 godov (From Notes made in 1970-1971). Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva (Aesthetics of verbal art)*. Moscow: Isskustvo, 423. [in Rus].
- Chipysheva, L.N. (2008). *Formirovanie obshcheuchebnoj kompetentnosti mladshogo shkolnika v usloviyah bezotmetchnogo obucheniya v processe izucheniya russkogo yazyka*. PhD thesis, Chelyabinsk, 200. [in Rus].
- Drozdova, O.E. (2017). *Metapredmetnyj podhod k obucheniyu russkomu yazyku v raznyh predmetnyh oblastyah shkolnogo obrazovaniya*. Doctoral thesis, Moscow, 474. [in Rus].
- Gee, J. (2012). *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*. Routledge.
- Green, B. (1999). The new literacy challenge. *Literacy Learning: Secondary Thoughts*, vol. 7(1), 36-46.
- Hirsh, E.D., Jr., Kett, J.F., Trefil, J. (1988). *The dictionary of cultural literacy*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Hirsh, E.D., Jr., Kett, J.F., Trefil, J. (2002). *The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy: What every American needs to know*. Boston: N.Y: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Jauss, H.R. (1982) *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*. Trans. Timothy Bahti. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Jordan, R.R. (1999). *Academic Writing Course: Study Skills in English*. Essex: Pearson Education Ltd., 160.
- Kern, R. (2000). *Literacy and Language Teaching*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Key findings of global survey PISA-2015 (2015). Retrieved from http://www.centeroko.ru/pisa15/pisa15_pub.htm. [in Rus].

- Lam, W.E. (2009). Multiliteracies on Instant Messaging in Negotiating Local, Translocal, and Transnational Affiliations: A Case of an Adolescent Immigrant. *Reading Research Quarterly*, (4), 377.
- Language analysis: a functional linguistics approach to reflective literacy. *English Teaching Practice and Critique*, vol. 6(2), 8-24.
- Malyavina, T.P. (2011). *Korrekcija orfograficheskikh i punktuacionnykh umenij i navykov starsheklassnikov kak sredstvo povysheniya urovnya pravopisnoj gramotnosti*. Doctoral thesis abstract, Moscow, 51. [in Rus].
- Wang, Min. (2015). Technology-Mediated L2 Literacy Practices and Identity Development. *The Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes*, Vol. 3(3), Special Issue, 467-481.
- Morley, J., Doyle P., Pople I. (2007). *University Writing Course*. Berkshire: Express Publishers, 120.
- Novikov, A.M. (2008). *Postindustrialnoe obrazovanie*. Moscow: Egves Publ., 136. [in Rus].
- Oshima, A., Hogue, A. (2006). *Writing Academic English*. New York: Pearson, 337.
- Plyusnina, E. M. (2004). *Fenomen gramotnosti v otechestvennom nachalnom obrazovanii XX veka*. PhD author's abstract, Moscow, 13. [in Rus].
- Regularities in the formation of the content of philological Education in modern society (under the ed. of O.M. Aleksandrova)* (2014). Institute for Strategy of Education Development of the Russian Academy of Education Moscow, "Ekon-Inform" publ., 275. [in Rus].
- Tekuchev, A.V. (1980). *Metodika russkogo yazyka v srednej shkole: Textbook for undergraduate students in Pedagogy*. Moscow, 414. [in Rus].
- The United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012)*. The Literacy Decade: Getting Started. (2004). UNESCO, printed in France.
- Vasilyevikh, I. P., Gosteva, Y.N. (2016). *To the problem of modelling tasks in the Russian language on the base of informational texts*. International Conference "Education Environment for the Information Age" (EEIA-2016) DOI. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20162901076>
- Vinogradova N.F., Kochurova E.A., Kuznetsova M.I., Romanova V.Y., Rydze O.A., Homyakova I.S. (2016). *Universal learning activities as the result of elementary school education: contents and methods of developing universal leaning activities of elementary school pupils*. Edited by N.F. Vinogradova. Moscow: FSBSI ISED RAE, 224. [in Rus]
- Warschauer, M. (2004). *Of digital divides and social multipliers: Combining language and technology for human development. Information and communication technologies in the teaching and learning of foreign languages: State of the art, needs and perspectives*. Moscow: UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education, 46-52.
- White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue. "Living Together as Equals in Dignity"* (2008). Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 77.