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**REALIZATION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF CONTINUITY IN  
FUNCTIONAL READING LITERACY FORMING**

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***Abstract***

The authors of the article analyze modern approaches to forming functional reading literacy in teaching the Russian language in middle school within the context of realization of the principle of continuity, which serves the foundation of the education process. It is the authors' purpose in this article to draw attention to the issue of forming functional reading literacy of students, to identify specific characteristics of their reading activity at one of the most difficult stages of learning — at the stage of transition from elementary to middle school. Based on contemporary methods of academic research, completed experiments and school teaching experience, the authors arrive at the conclusion that functional reading literacy is an essential element of general human culture, an element that is especially necessary for schoolchildren's adaptation to an ever-changing world and for realization of the principle of continuous education. This research resulted in methodological solutions proposed by the authors of this article as a way to form functional reading literacy based on the principle of continuity. The study reveals the most important skills that a school student of today needs in elementary and middle school, and identifies effective ways of forming functional literacy in high school. The article is addressed to special subject teachers, school administrators, methodologists, researchers in the field of education, as well as textbook and curriculum developers.

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**Keywords:** Principle of continuity, functional reading literacy, reading activity.



## 1. Introduction

One of the pivotal principles of education policy in the Russian Federation is “to ensure the right to education in the course of entire life in accordance with human needs, the education system’s adaptability to the level of training, specificities of development, human abilities and interests” (Federal State Educational Standard, 2010). In an era of advancement of information and communication technology, a continuous rise in the number, methods of receiving, accumulating and transmitting information, the right to education in the course of a person’s entire life cannot be ensured without targeted forming, in elementary and middle school, of reading literacy in present-day schoolchildren, based on the realization of the principle of continuity (Konceptcija nepreryvnogo obrazovanija, 2011; Aleksandrova et al., 2017; Neugebauer, 2017).

Reading literacy means a human ability to understand and use written texts, to reflect on them and to engage in reading in order to achieve one’s goals, to enlarge one’s knowledge and capabilities, to take part in social life. Reading literacy of schoolchildren is linked to their capacity to read and understand educational texts of varied functional focus (scientific/educational, popular science; official, journalistic, instructive, literary), of various genres (articles in textbooks, dictionary entries in dictionaries of different types, encyclopedias, etc.; laws, treaties, conventions, etc.; essays, reports, interviews, advertising, etc.; various types of manuals; short and long stories, novels, etc.); to their ability to extract information from text, to interpret and use it in addressing learning and training problems, and also in everyday life.

## 2. Problem Statement

Continuity has a general pedagogical nature, and, as a natural phenomenon in teaching and education, it is related to manifestation of a systematic, gradual and consistent approach to education and development, accompanies building a system of knowledge and skills in students at every transition from one learning environment to another (including at transition from one system to another) (Romanova, 1997). Realization of the principle of continuity, which is an essential didactic principle, determines, to a large extent, effectiveness and productivity of the teaching and education process. It is precisely for that reason that this pedagogical issue is actively discussed both in Russia (B.G. Ananyev, V.V. Davydov, A.Yu. Kupalova, M.R. Lvov, N.S. Rozhdestvensky, M.N. Skatkin, G.A. Fomicheva, T.I. Chizhova, etc. (Fedorenko, 1984; Homenko, 2017; Komissarova, 2013; Miheeva, 2011) and abroad.

For instance, in Italy, the principle of continuity is regarded as an essential prerequisite of safeguarding a student’s right to an organic and comprehensive educational process aimed at contributing to a continuous and multifaceted development of unique personality (Arduini et al., 2014). In the U.S., scholars analyze John Dewey’s experience in the application of that principle to present-day school (Bassey, 2010).

Realization of the principle of continuity is extremely important in the process of forming functional reading literacy of present-day schoolchildren (Campbell, 2017; Gudilina et al., 2017; Jung, 2017; Mills et al., 2017; Siddiqui et al., 2015). Uniform approaches to its forming create conditions for targeted development of essential abilities in text understanding based on principal activities. However, in contemporary practice of teaching the Russian language, psychology and age-related factors of students of different ages do not get sufficient recognition (L.I. Aidarova, L.V. Zankov, N.A. Menchinskaya, etc.).

Moreover, there is lack of harmonization between working methods and techniques of Russian-language teachers in elementary and middle school, so far as forming of functional reading literacy is concerned, which considerably complicates learning activities of students, especially as they make a transition from the elementary level of education to the middle level.

That said, in the system of international monitoring of general education quality two researches stand out, in which reading literacy of students is assessed. One is an international research in reading literacy — PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) and the other is an international programme for the assessment of students' educational achievement — PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment).

The PIRLS research, which was organized by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), reading literacy is defined as “the ability to understand and use those written language forms required by society and/or valued by the individual. Young readers can construct meaning from a variety of texts. They read to learn, to participate in communities of readers, and for enjoyment” (Osnovnaja informacija ob issledovanii PIRLS, 2016). The study evaluates the ability of elementary school graduates to read and understand various texts, as well as two types of reading, which are used more frequently than others by students in their curricular and extracurricular activities: literary reading (reading for the purpose of getting a reader's literary experience) and informational reading (reading for the purpose of receiving and using information).

In the PISA study, reading literacy is understood as follows: “Reading literacy is understanding, using, and reflecting on written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society” (Osnovnye rezul'taty mezhdunarodnogo issledovanija PISA-2015, 2015). The PISA study has 6 levels of reading literacy, of which level 2 is the threshold level. The most essential elements of reading activity are assessed: situations — the range of broad contexts or purposes for which reading takes place, text — the range of material that is read, and aspect — the cognitive approach that determines how readers engage with a text.

Analysis of approaches to the assessment of reading literacy, which are used in the above-mentioned studies, revealed their common features — for instance, in identifying reading abilities, — and their differences based on taking into account age-related features of schoolchildren aged 10 and 15 (Cukerman et al., 2011). The PIRLS-2016 international test recorded a higher level of reading literacy among Russian four-graders compared to students of middle school (Osnovnye rezul'taty mezhdunarodnogo issledovanija PISA-2015, 2015). For instance, in 2016, the Russian Federation was ranked first in the list of countries that participated in the PIRLS international research, reiterating once again its status of leader in text reading and understanding by elementary school graduates. On the contrary, middle-school students did not become leaders in the area of reading: average results of Russian 15-year students in reading literacy did not differ in any statistically significant way from the results showed by students of 15 countries (including Sweden, France, the Czech Republic, the U.S.), were statistically inferior to the results of 16 countries and superior to the results of 38 countries. Singapore students showed the best performance.

The ability to reflect upon and to evaluate information from a text is somewhat underdeveloped in Russian 15-year readers compared to their peers from OECD countries. Therefore, one of the most

essential measures to improve the situation is to ensure a continuous process of forming functional reading literacy at all stages of learning on the basis of realization of the principle of continuity.

### 3. Research Questions

Based on the performed analysis, the principal question of research was formulated: how to organize the process of mastering components of functional reading literacy by students in learning the Russian language in middle school on the basis of realization of the principle of continuity.

### 4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of research was to identify modern approaches to forming functional reading literacy of students in learning the Russian language in middle school on the basis of realization of the principle of continuity.

### 5. Research Methods

The principal methods of this research were content analysis, systematization of results of pedagogic and methodological academic research with the purpose of defining the state of knowledge about the problem; summarizing the authors' experience in writing textbooks and teaching guides; reflections on the authors' academic and pedagogic activities.

### 6. Findings

When developing functional reading literacy in the context of the idea of continuous education, the human ability to adapt to certain life situations and to acquire lacking knowledge in order to ensure meaningful functioning in an external environment is brought into the foreground. The process of mastering components of functional reading literacy cannot be limited in time: its running is conditioned by individual needs of human beings, and it can continue during a person's entire life. The purpose of continuous training in reading skills lies in the necessity to nurture in students the need and the readiness for maintaining and improving independently their functional reading literacy ability (Cardoso, 2017; Townes et al., 2017).

One possible cause for the declining level of reading literacy in middle-school students is lack of **continuity in studies across grades of education**. It means the following factors are not taken into consideration:

- specificities of selecting contents at contiguous stages of learning (the list of curricular texts is changed, genre peculiarity is changed; the text structure becomes more intricate, their volume enlarges, changes occur in the ratio of factual and implied information, the range of vocabulary required for the comprehension and transformation of the information contained in the text becomes wider, etc.);
- necessity of correlating a system of mental activities (operations) by which the contents are learned;
- expansion of the range of teaching objectives that need to be achieved when working with a text;
- "locality" of existing systems and methodologies, which are focused on one grade of education or one age of students and are based on different linguistic and methodological approaches.

In the context of realization of the principle of continuity, the process of mastering components of functional reading literacy by students, when they are taught the Russian language in middle school, has its own peculiar attributes, includes special methods, techniques, basic types of exercises. For instance, when addressing the teaching objective of establishing the precise lexical meaning of a word in a text, elementary schoolchildren can be given this assignment: “Using illustrations in the textbook, define the lexical meaning of the words,” and five-graders can be given an assignment where they will need to use a dictionary.

In order to foster an ability to identify the purpose of reading and to select the type of reading corresponding to a specific teaching objective, the following types of assignments can be proposed to elementary school students: “When reading the text, find an answer to the question, pick out information...” (find an answer, pick out information...). Middle-school students can be asked to put their own questions to a text, which would reflect various kinds of information (the thick/thin question technique).

Mastering the basic reading types and strategies when working with a curricular text is the principal method of forming functional reading literacy (Institut strategii razvitija obrazovanija Rossijskoj akademii obrazovanija, 2017). It should be noted that as early as in the first grade, when learning the Russian language, students gradually, starting from the elementary level, master various types of reading; starting from the fifth grade, that process must become more target-oriented. For instance, starting from the fifth grade, students master text scanning (assignments are worded like this: “Scan the text and find which paragraphs contain information that was new for you”; “Look through the text and explain why it consists of four parts,” etc.), skim reading (“Skim the text and identify the information that is the most important”), detailed reading (“Read the text carefully, and divide it into paragraphs,” “Read the text attentively and answer the questions,” etc.), reading for specific information (“Look at the figure on the front flyleaf of your textbook and find the spelling rules that you already know,” etc.).

Five-graders must master various methods of informational processing of text contents in a more targeted and systemic way compared to elementary school: they should know how to put questions covering theory, how to make a plan of the text (simple, elaborate; in the form of questions or nominative sentences expressing the subject of every part), how to extract information from a dictionary entry, map, drawing, photo. When organizing that work, teachers of the Russian language should take into account the mechanism of the reading-comprehension process: emergence of a driving force (why I am going to read it: to get information, to memorize, to enjoy myself, etc.), forming intention (how I am going to read it: superficially, I will look through it; I will find what I need; attentively; I will analyze the author’s viewpoint); transition to the text comprehension level (at the meaning level — getting information; at the purport level — understanding the author’s intention, the reader’s evaluation of and attitude to it) (Aleksandrova, Dobrotina & Gosteva, 2017).

Since the data obtained from a monitoring that was conducted within the framework of international studies in the area of reading recorded a relatively low level of reading literacy among middle-school students, it is necessary to pursue a more targeted effort in teaching schoolchildren reading strategies of texts of various genres, leaning on innovative methodologies that contribute to the forming

of reading literacy skills on the basis of deep comprehension of the reading mechanism and its goals (Aleksandrova et al., 2017; Wirza et al., 2017; Sukma et al., 2017; Wirza, 2017).

## **7. Conclusion**

The functional reading literacy is a component of general human culture. The importance of that component is determined by the necessity to select from the information flow and to absorb information required for the adaptation to an ever-changing world, for continuous education, the significance of which is recognized today especially distinctly, because it is driven by needs of present-day society (Uskova, 2016).

The functional reading literacy presumes an ability not only to extract important information from various sources but to use it effectively in order to address tasks of different levels of complexity in the course of curricular and everyday activities. Even elementary schoolchildren have those needs as they are engaged in curricular activities, which is the principal pursuit in elementary school.

Learning the culture of working with an academic text, elementary schoolchildren are more successful in absorbing the material of all subjects of the curriculum without exception, and in the future, as they acquire at middle school stable skills of informational processing of academic, scientific, popular science, official texts, of perceiving literary, journalistic, or literary-journalistic texts in the unity of their form and substance, they master educational subjects not only of the philology, but also of the physics, mathematics, natural science, social science cycles with a high degree of awareness and confidence.

Mid-grade schoolchildren, compared to elementary school schoolchildren, see their exigencies related to the use of reading literacy develop gradually. Those children become actively engaged in reading activity, as they strive to grasp the meaning of issues of life, to evaluate them from the standpoint of their social experience, practices of communicating with peers and adults, because in that period communicative activities take the centre stage.

Adapting to the world around them, schoolchildren simultaneously lean on their life experience and reading experiences, and they draw upon varied sources to get their knowledge about the world. Therefore, it is extremely important to have certain abilities related to reading activity well-developed by that time, and for schoolchildren to have adopted correct approaches of working with scientific and literary texts. The importance of mastering those approaches is determined by the subconscious aspiration of adolescents whose personality is still taking shape to use adopted activity techniques in dealing with those sources that they no longer treat as “unfamiliar” by virtue of the feeling of success they have experienced when absorbing relevant information required for addressing particular tasks.

Therefore, it is precisely for that reason that, in order to realize the principles of continuity and forward-thinking, it is necessary, even as early as in elementary school, to create cases of success, which are rooted in a well-thought effectual training of children in universal methods of dealing with educational texts. The texts read by elementary schoolchildren must evoke a natural emotional response from the child: their contents may include surprising facts, description of unusual events or, on the contrary, familiar situations in which peers of schoolchildren can be involved who act in a controversial or praiseworthy and admirable way.

Reading those texts not only can build a stable interest in reading activity but can also contribute to intellectual development of schoolchildren, development of their emotional background and communication skills, which becomes especially important in middle school. In addition, it is imperative to note that one result of working with those texts is forming schoolchildren's general culture, communicative culture and behavior in different curricular and everyday situations.

The following skills will result from systematic activities of teachers in elementary and middle school, which pursue forming functional reading literacy:

- to define the purpose of reading;
- to select the type of reading according to a particular teaching objective;
- to master various types of reading depending on the goals of curricular activities;
- to pinpoint relevant and to exclude irrelevant information in a given situation;
- to use various methods of informational text processing with the purpose of absorbing relevant information;
- to interpret information on the basis of one's life and reading experiences;
- to perform reflexive analysis of what was read;
- to present information from read texts in various forms;
- to use absorbed information for a definite purpose;
- to perceive a text in the unity of form and substance;
- to evaluate the compositional and spoken form of a proposed text.

Creating the foundation of functional reading literacy, teachers of elementary school must have those goals in mind for the purpose of realizing the principle of forward-thinking. Simultaneously, teachers in middle school must take into account the level of reading literacy achieved by students by the time they graduate from elementary school and lean on the accumulated experience of working with academic and literary texts for the purpose of keeping schoolchildren's interest in reading activity and an effective use of those abilities and skills that children have acquired by the time they start their studies in middle school.

In high school, the foreground is taken by a mission linked to a conscious search for one's own ways of learning and to self-education. In that regard, functional reading literacy becomes not only an object of forming and development, but an object of improvement and the principal tool of education. That should be taken into account when planning and organizing work related to forming functional reading literacy in elementary and middle school.

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