

**EEIA-2018**  
**2018 International Conference "Education Environment for  
the Information Age"**

**THE RELATIONSHIP OF LITERARY AND CULTURAL  
FUNCTIONAL LITERACY OF THE MODERN PUPIL**

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***Abstract***

The article discusses the relationship between literary and cultural literacy in the light of the development of functional literacy of the modern pupil and the ways to prevent the decline in the literacy rate and the level of culture of modern people. The authors define the concepts of literary and cultural functional literacy, study the structure of these learning components and their interrelation, provide already-existing reading support programmes, cite data from sociological studies on children's and teenagers' reading interests. Considering the relation between the concepts of general cultural functional literacy and cultural literacy, widely used in foreign academic discourse, the authors analyze the interrelationship of the components of functional literacy (integrative and subject-specific) in accordance with the concept of functional literacy of the pupil, which serves as the framework for this research. The authors conclude that cultural functional literacy is one of the components of social literacy, but it cannot be designated as the subject-specific component due to its all-inclusive nature. The solution to the problem of the effective development of literary literacy is seen in its relationship with cultural functional literacy. The prospects of further work consist in the development of teaching and learning materials, effectively contributing to the development of these two key components of functional literacy. Mechanisms are described whereby, in the context of non-linear education, a new relational system between universities and their social partners arises. A self-organizing corporate community (the school-and-university community) clarifies the didactic tasks in the non-linear system of teacher training.

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**Keywords:** Education, functional literacy, cultural literacy.



## **1. Introduction**

Literature is a part of culture that preserves the eternal moral and spiritual values of humanity. At the same time, it represents an important link, a bridge which brings together the common cultural values of different times and different peoples.

“The objective of literary education consists in helping the reader to take a glimpse into the "world of values" of different generations, see the ways and means of self-understanding and self-expression, to develop an understanding of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue as one of the greatest values in the world” (Aristova, Berdysheva, Kritarova & Strizhekurova, 2017).

Education in itself is also a widespread cultural phenomenon. On the one hand, the school cannot compete with television, radio, let alone the Internet, in terms of speed and range with which information is distributed. On the other hand, a school can be and already is a translator of culture, especially since it has all modern means of information and communication technologies at its disposal.

The world community has come a long way from the traditional understanding of literacy as a basic ability to read and write to developing a concept of "new literacy" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Gee, 2000), which is based on the capacity for an activity - "to interpret, monitor and describe in detail what has been studied" (Henry, 2004). What we are talking about is functional literacy which includes “the skills, including life skills, beyond the ability to read and to write that people need to meet the requirements of daily life” (UNESCO, 2004).

Among these requirements, the development of general culture of a person and his social skills is of key importance. School has a major role to play in this process. “Literacy acquisition is not only one of the most important goals of schooling and the highest of academic responsibilities, but it is also the foundation for future learning and participation in society and employment. It also allows access to sources of personal enrichment such as social interaction and cultural activities” (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014).

## **2. Problem Statement**

Modern society is characterized by the increased information flow, rapid and ever-accelerating development of technologies, which results in a real danger of losing those important cultural constants that allow us to preserve the intergenerational continuity and to move forward.

Literature is one of the most significant parts of culture, but the interest in reading has been falling worldwide, especially among the younger generation. No wonder, therefore, that recently national programmes of reading support have been developed in different countries and the problem of reading literacy of pupils has become the focus of attention.

This global process demonstrates the relevance of the problem of this research. The issues of cultural literacy of people have long attracted the attention of the academic community, but the problem of the interconnected development of literary and cultural literacy of the modern pupil has not yet received the consideration that it deserves. It is necessary to identify and provide a scientific basis for the relations between the components that constitute functional literacy. It is also important to determine the place and role of both its integrative and its subject-specific components in the learning process and assess the contribution of each of them to the achievement of the prescribed learning outcomes.

### **3. Research Questions**

The article discusses the substantive content of the notions of literary literacy and cultural functional literacy, analyzes the domestic and foreign research efforts in this field. It also defines the best ways to develop literary and cultural literacy of the modern pupil by revealing their interrelation in the process of literary education in school.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to determine the relation between literary and cultural functional literacy and to define the ways to establish their interconnected development in the process of studying literature in secondary school.

Thus, it is necessary to consider the place of cultural and literary literacy as components of functional literacy of the pupil and to identify their role as integrative and subject-specific components.

From the perspective of the goals of modern literary education in school, the need for teaching and learning materials on the interconnected development of literary and cultural functional literacy of the pupil in Literature classes is to be defined.

### **5. Research Methods**

In accordance with the purpose of the study, the systematic method, the methods of theoretical and content analysis of the results of foreign and domestic research in the field of functional literacy were used in this paper. The sociological method determining the level of the development of literary and cultural literacy of the modern pupil was used to examine reading interests of modern children and teenagers.

### **6. Findings**

The research carried out previously made it possible to determine the structural components of functional literacy (FL) of the modern pupil. According to the theory developed under the guidance of N.F. Vinogradova, a member of the Russian Academy of Education, functional literacy includes integrative and subject-specific components (Vinogradova et al., 2017). Integrative components are reading literacy, communication literacy, information literacy and social literacy. Literary functional literacy is considered to be a subject-specific component of reading literacy.

It should be noted here that our understanding of literary literacy, of its place and role in the process of school education somewhat differs from the one popular in foreign academic studies devoted to this subject (Baleiro, 2010; Wang, 2015). Most of the experts in this field of literacy follow the theory established by R. Kern, a British scientist who links the notion of literary literacy with the second-language acquisition on the basis of reading fiction (Kern, 2000; Kern & Schultz, 2005).

Only a few foreign studies are devoted to the problem of the development of literary literacy in Literature classes. Some of them note that there is a connection between literary literacy and the hermeneutic approach to the study of the work of literature (Suominen & Tuomi, 2015), while others focus not only on a substantive definition of the concept, but also on the opportunity to introduce a system for measuring the development of literary literacy at Literature lessons (Meier et al., 2017).

In our previous research, we defined the concept literary functional literacy as a subject-specific component of FL and assessed its contribution to the development of integrative components in the process of studying literature at school (Aleksandrova, Aristova, Dobrotina, Gosteva & Vasilevyh, 2017).

For the purposes of determining the structure of FL, the cultural functional literacy should be considered as one of the components of social literacy. However, it cannot be designated as the subject-specific component due to its all-inclusive nature. The development of cultural functional literacy is the objective of almost all subjects included in the school education curriculum, which places it among the integrative components of the FL. This has made it necessary to further clarify the relation between the content of the notion of general cultural functional literacy used in the theory of N.F. Vinogradova, and the notion of cultural literacy widely spread in foreign academic discourse.

The concept of cultural literacy was first introduced in the 1980s by an American scientist E.D. Hirsch and since then has been used by practically everyone in the global academic community. The core of the concept is as follows: cultural literacy "... 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, 2002). At the same time, the scientist notes: "cultural literacy, unlike expert knowledge, is meant to be shared by everyone" (Hirsh, Kett & Trefil, 2002).

In view of our study, it is important to stress here that this definition is concerned with that background knowledge, without which the understanding of the utterance becomes impossible, and, thus, the act of communication is hindered. Fiction can also be defined as an utterance expressed by the specific artistic means, while the establishment of a dialogical relationship between the author and the reader is the basis for its perception. At the same time, background knowledge of the reader largely determines not only the ability to fully comprehend the author's idea, but the very desire to do it. As a result, it is the deficient cultural basis that sometimes causes lack of interest in literature.

While defining the concept of literary literacy previously in our research, we focused on the knowledge and understanding of the "historical and cultural context of the work" and "the ability to build links with this context (intratextual and intertextual)" (Aleksandrova, Aristova, Dobrotina, Gosteva & Vasilevyh, 2017), which is directly linked to the cultural functional literacy.

Literary literacy also includes the major meta-subject result of learning – the content reading: text comprehension and the ability to interpret it. The ability to develop this skill is as much dependent on background knowledge that constitutes cultural literacy as it is on the ability to decode information stored in the text. Therefore, different readers comprehend the same text differently. According to A.A. Leont'ev, who follows the theories of L.S. Vygotsky and M.M. Bakhtin, "the content of the text is essentially polyphonic, it has many degrees of freedom ... It is multifaceted, the world behind it can be seen and comprehended by the recipient in different ways depending on what he needs to see, for what purpose and with what mindset he is <scrutinizing> the text" (Leont'ev, 1997). Interestingly, E.D. Hirsch in his works on cultural literacy also points out that its relationship with content reading is of particular importance: "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).

The question of the reading interests of modern youth is bound to arise in this connection. Sociological studies conducted in different countries show practically the same pattern: interest in reading fiction, especially the classics, is falling, these great cultural assets remain unclaimed, and culturally significant concepts which are related to them lose their importance.

This situation is especially alarming for Russia, where literature traditionally played the role of the main custodian of national cultural codes. According to the data provided by Russian sociologists, leisure reading of young people mainly includes translations of modern foreign fiction, mostly in the genre of fantasy and speculative fiction. J.K. Rowling is the favorite foreign author among girls and Stephen King – among boys. In this respect, the results of the questionnaire about the reading of the works of Russian classics that are part of the school curriculum came as a surprise: more than half of the respondents expressed a generally positive attitude toward it. At the same time, both the girls and the boys said that F.M. Dostoevsky is their favorite author among the classics (Borusyak, 2015).

This interesting sociological research leads to some unexpected conclusions: contrary to what is generally thought, modern youth, like the older generation, continues to perceive the classics as the basis of Russian culture, and it is the school that participates effectively in the development of this key value orientation.

The question of the substantive content of culturally significant units related to the works of Russian literature is another aspect of the problem. In the New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, E.D. Hirsch singles out a special section concerned with the works of national literature - it is titled "Literature in English" (Hirsch, Kett & Trefil, 2002). A similar section in the Russian dictionary of cultural literacy could be called "Russian Literature", but, probably, such a dictionary will not be created any time soon.

It should be noted that some attempts have been made to carry out this challenging task, but so far they have not been the subject of wide discussion or approval even among specialists (Pushnyh, Shevchenko, 1994; Kozyrev, Pentina & Chernyak, 2008). There needs to be an unconditional acceptance of its results not only among scholars but also among the majority of the national community, and its various groups, in order to implement a project like "The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy" by E.D. Hirsch.

It should not go unmentioned here that over the past 2-3 years there has been a heated discussion of the national literary canon: not only specialists (scientists and educators), but also public figures, politicians, the creative intelligentsia, parents, students and even pupils have expressed a keen interest in participating in this debate. The discussion on the composition of works that are part of school course of Literature is connected with the same issue. Leaving aside the question of the literary canon itself, we should, nonetheless, point to one notable trend that has become apparent in the course of these discussions.

What strikes us here is not only the great interest from such a wide audience, but more so the fact that the majority sees eye to eye on the question of what works of Russian literature should not be removed from school courses. For example, the suggestion to remove "War and Peace" by L.N. Tolstoy triggered waves of protest, even among pupils, who, according to some, are unable to read such a lengthy and difficult novel.

In fact, what we are talking about are the precedent works of literature, which, in our opinion, would have to be included the corresponding section of the national dictionary of cultural literacy. These texts are not only known to everyone who identify themselves with Russian culture, but they are also perceived as

an integral part of it. The Russian classics of the 19th century, which have been part of the school courses for a long time, definitely belong to such texts. These are the masterpieces by A.S. Pushkin, N.V. Gogol, L.N. Tolstoy, F.M. Dostoevsky, A.P. Chekhov and many other Russian writers, whose names are known throughout the world.

These facts allow us to arrive at some unexpected conclusions: the content boundaries of literary literacy which should be formed and developed in school are already fixed. Obviously, the range of these works is much more limited than is required by the programme in Literature discipline, but the aims of the literary literacy development cannot coincide completely with the prescribed subject learning outcomes.

With regard to literary literacy, it is important to stress that its relationship with the formation of cultural functional literacy should become one of the indicators of its effective development. The fact is that the study of those precedent works of Russian literature is intended to ensure that pupils master not only subject, but, first and foremost, meta-subject skills, a great number of which is no less important for the development of cultural functional literacy of pupils. Determining the components of these skills and developing teaching and learning materials, as well as a multifaceted system of exercises and tasks that would most effectively contribute to the successful development of these two important components of functional literacy of pupils is the aim of future research into the problem under consideration.

## **7. Conclusion**

The research led to the conclusion that the development of literary literacy and cultural literacy, the two being inextricably interrelated, is an important component of the development of functional literacy of the modern pupil, which contributes to the enrichment of his/her inner world and the development of one's personal integrity. This is the basis for building a system of humanistic values of a person and is a guarantor of one's ability to interact with others in today's complicated and inconsistent world.

At the same time, the study revealed that literary literacy that makes it possible to perceive literature as part of the native and global culture is one of the most important components of a well-thought-out system for the formation and development of cultural literacy of the pupil. The understanding and the evaluation of the peculiarities of one's national culture became possible in the process of studying the best examples of Russian literature, as well as examples from foreign classics and foreign contemporary literature. Furthermore, pupils get an opportunity to observe not only the unique character of their native literature, but also its affinity with others, they are able to perceive it as an important part of the global culture. It is the common moral challenges and common values depicted in fiction that help a person to become conscious of himself in the world and in society and help to resist any negative outside influences.

The cultivation of a person who is literary and culturally literate, who knows how to assess and comprehend the common, global nature of moral standards and values depicted in the literature of different peoples, is one of the primary tasks, whose solution will contribute to the increasing cultural contacts and the mutual enrichment of nations.

## Acknowledgements

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 for 2017-2019. (No. 27.7948.2017 / BCH).

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