

SUBJECTIVE PERCEPTION OF LITERARY TEXTS TO PROMOTE TEXT COMPREHENSION IN THE FIFTH GRADE

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ABSTRACT

The ability to read and perceive a text is one of the foundations necessary for a person to work with diverse texts in different life situations. Thus, the proficiency of reading competence in the last decade is a topical study object. Observations show that at the end of the first stage of primary education (at the end of the third grade), students demonstrate technically good reading skills, that is, they can clearly read written texts, follow the boundaries of sentences and read in appropriate intonation. To promote reading competence successively in the second stage of primary education, reading skills must be continuously improved by using various texts, in addition to fiction. As an art of word, literature creates, encourages and develops different experiences of each future reader. The subjective perception of a literary work is related to the awareness of the reader's experience, synthesis of images, visualisation and awareness of fiction and reality, which is a prerequisite for understanding the text.

This research aims to explore the methodology used in literature acquisition to promote text comprehension by fifth-grade students through activating the subjective perception of literary work.

The objectives of this study are (1) to analyse research on the promotion of text comprehension and the subjective perception of literary work and (2) identify and analyse the text and subjective perceptions of fifth-grade students. Results of the text comprehension test and survey are examined in the study. The study involved 96 fifth graders.

Keywords: *literary didactics, reading skills, text comprehension, subjective perception, fifth grade.*

Introduction

The promotion of literacy has been the focus of researchers for many years, assessing the impact of reading on students' learning achievements and exploring the acquisition and creation of new knowledge and the cognitive and socio-emotional development of individuals. The modern approach to education is to provide a learning process that enables students to express themselves, be creative and work in a team, that is, to

analyse and critically evaluate information where reading skills are important. Literacy can be defined as the child's ability to decipher written symbols; it is a receptive communication process, the tool for critical thinking and decision-making and the means of acquiring knowledge (Medina & Villarreal, 2020; Tubele & Serova, 2020). Reading begins with observing the relationship between letters and sounds and continues as a psycholinguistic activity that focuses on the perception of meaning and then on the purpose of reading the text, evaluating and expressing one's attitude. In comprehension and conscious reading, when the content of the text is understood, the main idea expressed by the author and one's attitude towards what has been read (Drelinga, 2020).

As students' consciousness develops, reading a text becomes an intellectual activity linked to the development of inner speech, where text comprehension is important. Assessing the student's reading and comprehension skills is essential to the selection of appropriate texts. This step is a prerequisite for the student to improve his/her reading skills and develop sustainable reading habits. The teacher is responsible for the selection of texts and the teaching and reading methods used to promote students' text comprehension (Jose & Raja, 2011; Ozola & Geske, 2019; Medina & Villarreal, 2020).

The concept of literacy is the ability to read a text and determine the deepest meaning of its context. It is broader than the ability to read or understand a text. Literacy is a complex skill that includes different areas of learners' knowledge, experience and creative activity dimensions. It is influenced by the student's cultural experience, environment, and ability to understand (Drelinga, 2020).

Literacy competence is not a mechanical phenomenon. It is closely related to a person's thinking abilities and creativity and determines actions altogether and separately in a particular case when associative thinking is important. Literacy competence also refers to one's ability to reveal what is not directly stated in the text, including subtexts, symbols and meaning transfer (Laiveniece, 2011).

For literacy to become an acquired skill, the student must be able to find the most important information, paraphrase it and make notes; be able to describe a person, event, phenomenon or process; acquire skills to fix and identify the problem; acquire skills to form conclusions and summary; and explain new words and terms, learn pronunciation and activate memorisation (Drelinga, 2020) .

Reading a literary work is different from reading other types of text, such as an encyclopaedia, a journal article, or a textbook. Literary text comprehension requires an understanding of the comprehensive information content of a literary work, linguistic and semantic information. The influence

of a literary text on the reader is determined by its main feature, that is, it is an artistic reflection of real life. The reader perceives this text not only from its informative content but also from the meaning and idea of the work (Lytvynenko, 2015). As works of word art, the ideas, images, ideals and artistic values of literary texts are perceived, felt and comprehended in the form of aesthetic experiences. Thus, finding a balance between the intellectual and emotional components is important (Celmiņa, 2018). The perception of literary work begins from the perception of language formation, that is, the perception of sound and rhythm, to the analysis of the language and style of the text. The most important aspect of reading competence is the reader's cognitive activity and his/her perception and emotional development in literary competence (Skalberga, 2012). Accordingly, the acquisition of literature as a subject and the reading of literary works have two conditions related to the development of the reader's personality: (1) the development of critical thinking and (b) the development of the reader's personality (Lustyantie, 2015). The student's previous experience contributes to the understanding of literary work. Thus, reading literary works also positively impact how students know themselves and analyse their experiences (Skalberga, 2012; Freiberga, 2013; Culler, 2002).

Culler (2002) points out that while reading a literary work, the reader forms relationships with images and situations, taking into account his/her personal experience, memories and mood. This process gives meaning to the perception of literary work. Therefore, relying only on reading and lexical understanding of the text is insufficient.

As Skalberga (2012) points out, the stages of subjective perception of a literary work include (1) perception of content, (2) access to literary work and (3) a link to the reader's experience.

The subjective perception of literary work is based on the perception of content. The student obtains the first information about the literary text, which is facilitated by the answers to the questions who, where, when, to whom and about what. At this stage, the quality of reading depends on the development of the student's emotional sphere and ability to use imagination and visualise the information contained in the text. The student must engage in literary work. If the student fails to imagine, then he/she develops perceptual problems and cannot remember what and how things were depicted in the text. In the subjective perception of literary work, the content of the text should form a connection with the student's experience.

At this stage, the student uses his/her life experience related to the content of the text, experiences events, gets to know others, including their characteristics, actions and situations, and often comes to conclusions such as 'I like' and 'I do not like' (Buehl, 2009). If the literary text remains

only on the student's emotional level, then he/she cannot understand and judge the meaning of the text and does not become an interpretive reader (Skalberga, 2012; Culler, 2002; Lustyantje, 2015).

The student's experience is also important in the perception of literary work. The experience can be twofold: (1) self-experience, which the pupil acquires through direct perception, and which forms personal knowledge, skills and attitudes towards oneself, others and the world, and (2) shared self-experience gained through language and communication most and often is the experience of other people (Seilman & Larsen, 1989).

The reading methodology uses reading strategies to promote students' text comprehension. According to the competence approach, the reading methodology determines learning by learning to read. Text comprehension is based on the comprehension strategy, which is formed by successive student activities, that is, 'read, stop, think, ask, make a connection' (Robb, 2002).

Text comprehension is an active process of constructing meaning (Dooley & Matthews, 2009) and interacting deeply with the text (McKeown et al., 2009). Learning to read and reading to learn must take place simultaneously and continuously from pre-school to secondary school, and possibly in later life (Robb, 2002), along with other early reading skills (Dooley & Matthews, 2009).

Such a reading strategy helps the student to read and understand informative texts and encourages close interaction between him/her and the text (McKeown et al., 2009), reflecting the thought processes that experienced students can perform automatically (e. g. Neufeld, 2005).

The strategy involves flexibility and can be altered to respond to students' different needs. The student can use the strategy several times while reading a text.

The reading strategy steps include the following:

1. Read: The student reads the text and text images.
2. Stop: The student stops reading to identify unfamiliar words.
3. Think about it: The student is encouraged to analyse structural elements, such as signal words, and how they help to understand the text. Therefore, the student is encouraged to synthesise information.
4. Ask: The student asks the author questions about the text to promote comprehension.
5. Connect: The student considers other information about the topic he/she may know and connects with his/her personal experiences, other texts and/or world events.

During the 'read' phase (step 1), students are encouraged to pay attention to each information source provided in the text.

The 'stop' step (step 2) of the strategy involves a gradual 'connection and integration of information' (McKeown et al., 2009, p. 28). Using the

think-and-ask approach, the student can stop after reading a section of the text (e. g. a sentence, a short paragraph or a set of pictures).

The 'think about it' step (step 3) in the reading strategy encourages students to think about what they have read and identify structural elements, such as keywords and formatting, to promote comprehension (e. g. the words 'first' and 'next' in procedural texts can help) (Dymock & Nicholson, 2010). To enhance further students' understanding, the thinking step encourages them to summarise and synthesise the information provided in print and the text features and raise questions about the information provided in the text (Dymock & Nicholson, 2010).

The 'ask' step (step 4) of the reading strategy invites students to a dialogue with the author. In this step, students ask questions about the content of the text (Wilhelm, 2007). Consequently, the students start talking about the author of the text as if he/she were present and ask questions based on the author's words. The process of asking questions about a text encourages students to delve into the text to develop its meaning (Dymock & Nicholson, 2010).

The 'connect' step (step 5) of the reading strategy encourages students to combine prior knowledge and experience with the new ones (Dymock & Nicholson, 2010), reaching a personal level of the text (Neufeld, 2005).

The comprehension strategy is based on the teacher's ability to select carefully the texts they offer to students. For the initial understanding of the text, the text should consist of simple sentences, have several functions and must be a topic of interest to students (Jose & Raja, 2011; Lustyantie, 2015).

The essence of the text comprehension strategy is the recognition that the teacher encourages the student to read in-depth to construct the meaning of what is being read, rather than emphasising the amount of the text being read. Thus, readers can think critically and creatively. According to Jose and Raja (2013), teachers need to use various reading strategies in their learning, especially critical reading.

The characters depicted in a literary text experience varying feelings and emotions and act and organise differently, revealing the idea of the content of the text. Thus, it is important not only to perceive the actions and experiences of the characters as such but also to understand them in the context of the story (Bal et al., 2011). Given the inherent subjectivity in meaning, understanding and evaluating the experiences of literary images, opinions, actions and behaviours, as well as understanding the plot in context, is always subjective, which may differ from other readers' subjective meaning.

Freiberga (2013) states that a text that does not correspond to a child's experience interferes with the perception of the story, image experiences

and consequences of behaviour and action to form connections between parts of the story and understand the meaning of the language. Thus, no personal meaning is formed in the child's consciousness, and the child has no personal attitude towards the perceived meaning of the text.

In order to promote the subjective perception of the text, it is important to actualize the emotional experience during the perception of the literary text, which is related to the phenomenon of recognizing the experience in the work of art (Gadamer, 1999). Recognition of an event is not only a recall; it also draws parallels between the experience and its personal meaning. The depiction in the text can remain within it as a distant event described in the book. Such an event is not connected with the child's life but can also be actualised in the context of real life and reveal new perspectives, relationships and behaviours. The child's emotional experience is important for the perception and processing of the content of the text. It creates emotional responsiveness, actualises images and scenes in the imagination and activates thinking, forming a personal meaning of the perceived meaning of the text (Goldstein, 2009; Miall & Kuiken, 2002; Bal et al., 2011; Bal & Veltkamp, 2013).

Miall and Kuiken (2002) reveal that a fictional narrative (literary work) will influence the readers only if they can create a world of narration in their imagination that is real in their context. More importantly, an opportunity to be involved in the story can be created if it is realistic for the reader. This phenomenon will be reflected later.

Methodology

The research was conducted using qualitative and quantitative research methods: a test to assess text comprehension and a content analysis of various aspects of the subjective perception of text by fifth-grade students.

The research base consists of 96 fifth-grade students. In order to characterize/describe the subjective perception of the literary text, students from schools with different literacy levels were involved in the study. Parents were informed about students' involvement in the study. The research was carried out over the period from October to December of 2021 in literature classes, involving 5th grade students. According to the achievable results of the curriculum in the middle school education standard and sample programs (Cabinet of Ministers, 2018 (747)), students read two literary texts: classic and modern.

In the text comprehension study, each fifth-grade student was required to take a reading assessment test with a break of two lessons. The test included reading two texts and answering questions about the reading, which took 30 minutes to complete. The comprehension test includes the

following criteria: (1) finding information in the text (2) understanding the main idea of the text.

The test consisted of multiple-choice tasks. The first text intended for measuring students' text comprehension was a fragment from classical literature, whereas the second text was taken from the latest literature. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the test results. The assessment of text comprehension was expressed at three levels: low, medium and high.

After the test, the students completed a questionnaire of self-assessment of their perception and comprehension of the read text for 10 minutes. The self-assessment survey consists of closed and open-ended questions in which students expressed their views on text comprehension and subjective perception. The survey results were analysed through content analysis and descriptive statistics.

Results

Students took a reading test. Research data were analysed based on the analysis of theoretical positions and the collected findings and using the quantitative data processing program Excel.

To study the fifth-grade students' subjective perception of the literary work, their understanding of the literary text must be clarified, specifically, whether the required information is found in the text, compared with their self-assessment of the information found in the text (Figure 1).

The results of the fact test, and the students' self-assessment indicate that finding information in the text is average. The results show that the students find the necessary information in the text better ($n = 64\%$) than they evaluate themselves ($n = 51\%$).

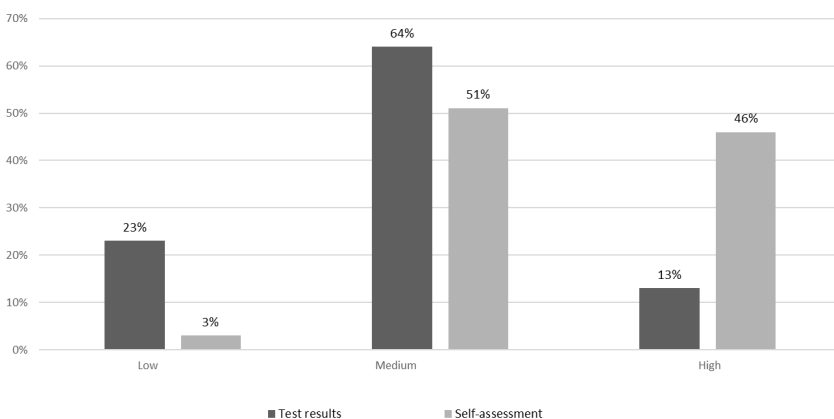


Figure 1. Comprehension of a Literary Text versus Information Found in the Text

A relatively large proportion of students ($n = 23\%$) find information in the text as low, in contrast to the fifth-grade students' self-assessment of finding information in the text ($n = 3\%$).

From the analysed text on finding information in the text, the tendency of fifth-grade students to evaluate their understanding of literary work is higher ($n = 46\%$) than their actual understanding ($n = 13\%$).

The perception of literary work includes the students' ability to examine and read the construction of meaning while reading the text, that is, to understand the main idea of the text (Figure 2).

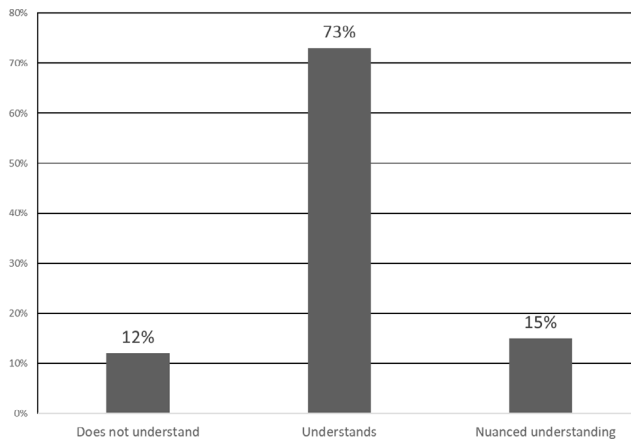


Figure 2. Comprehension of a Literary Text versus Understanding the Main Idea of the Text

According to the test results, the majority of fifth-grade students ($n = 73\%$) understand the main idea of the text. A relatively similar proportions of fifth-grade students do not understand ($n = 12\%$) or nuance the main idea of the text ($n = 15\%$). From the obtained indicators, it can be concluded that most fifth-grade students construct the meaning of the read text and understand its main idea of the text, which encourages them to think critically and creatively.

After the text comprehension test, the students conducted a self-assessment questionnaire. The first question refers to understanding the meaning of what was read at the lexical level: were there words in the text that you did not understand, or were there sentences that needed to be read again (Figure3)?

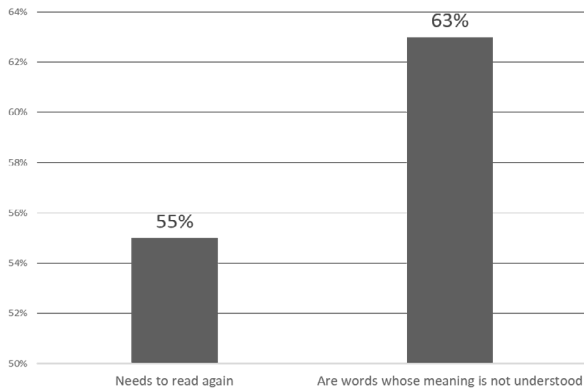


Figure 3. Self-assessment of Vocabulary Comprehension

The results of the questionnaire show that the majority of students ($n = 63\%$) had unintelligible words in their texts, whereas others indicate ($n = 55\%$) places in the texts that needed to be read again to understand them. Data on the comprehension of text vocabulary show that in both text forms, students have indicated words whose meaning they do not know. This result confirms the need to activate students' vocabulary with different layers.

The component of subjective perception is important for understanding the text. It is influenced by the reader's experience and ability to connect what is described to one's life events. Therefore, the study participants were asked if they saw a similarity in the text to their experience (Figure 4).

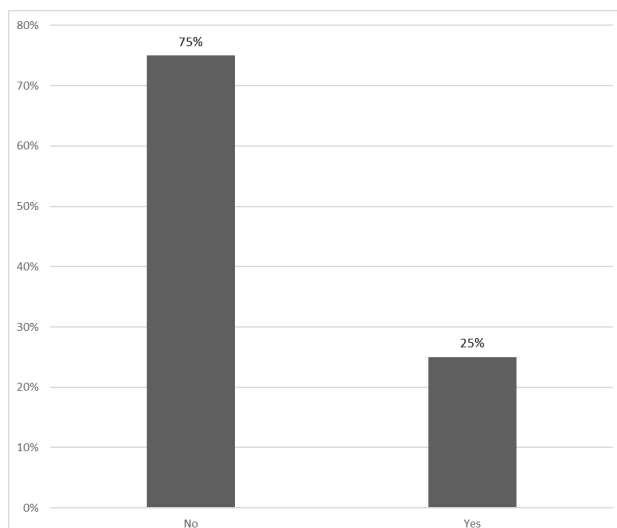


Figure 4. Self-assessment: Connecting to Experience

The research data show that the majority ($n = 75\%$) of the students did not see a connection with their experience. In the self-assessment survey, 25% of the students indicate that their experience with literary work is related and explain that they have had similar situations in their lives with friends ($n = 13\%$) and family members ($n = 7\%$) and see similar characteristics ($n = 5\%$) with a literary image. The analysis of self-experience and subjective perception of the text does not indicate a relationship with belonging to a particular gender.

The students' opinion on whether the read text was interesting was analysed. The outcome is an indicator of the subjective perception of the text. As a result, the text of classical literature was positively evaluated by 18% of the students, and the fragment of modern literary text by 52% of the students. Modern literature depicts events in the imaginary reality closest to the students. Thus, we conclude that the work of modern literature is more interesting to the students, though it has not promoted text comprehension.

Conclusions

1. The subjective perception of a text is crucial to the perception of a literary text. It begins with reading the text, evaluating lexical comprehension, empathising with the literary work and making connections with one's experience.
2. The results of the study indicate that the reading ability of 5th grade students is related to the subjective perception of literary works. The interest in the provided text depends on the understanding of the meanings of the words used in the text, which depends on the students' experience.
3. To promote students' literacy and motivation to read literature in the learning process, the selected teaching methods should activate students' subjective experience and develop their ability to connect what they have read with their experience.
4. Teachers must determine students' reading skills, text comprehension and experience to select suitable literary texts for them. They should be relevant to the students' needs and interests but have no statistical significance between classical and modern literature.
5. The teacher is responsible for the selection of texts to promote students' text comprehension, which would facilitate reading. While learning literature, it is more recommended to choose modern texts that meet the needs and interests of the students, offering different options for explanation of the incomprehensible words.

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