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DEVELOPING READING LITERACY OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN LITERATURE LESSONS (BASED ON PISA-STYLE TASKS)

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Abstract:

The article examines the problem of developing reading literacy of high school students in literature lessons. It explains the concept of "reading literacy" as defined in the PISA international assessment framework, and describes three groups of reading skills and the types of tasks aimed at developing them. A system of PISA-style tasks based on A.P. Chekhov's play "The Seagull" is proposed, including work with continuous and non-continuous texts. The article concludes that the systematic use of such tasks in literature lessons makes it possible to move from reproductive retelling to the interpretation and evaluation of a literary text.

Keywords: reading literacy, functional literacy, PISA, literature lesson, high school, literary text, interpretation, critical thinking, A.P. Chekhov.

In today's information society, the ability to read is no longer merely a technical skill. A person needs not just to reproduce what they have read, but to find the necessary information in a text, interpret it, evaluate it critically and apply it in real-life situations. It is precisely this ability that is denoted by the concept of "reading literacy", which is now regarded as the foundation of functional literacy as a whole [1; 11].

The problem is particularly relevant for Uzbekistan. In 2022, the country took part in the PISA study for the first time, and the average reading literacy score of Uzbek students was 336, compared with an average of 476 across participating countries [12; 13]. This result showed that the traditional methodology, focused on retelling and memorising facts, does not develop students' ability to work with a text at the level of interpretation and evaluation.

Researchers in other countries note similar difficulties. According to I.V. Ryzhkova and S.A. Tolstenko, even after targeted instruction, only 17% of students in the experimental group and 3% in the control group coped with tasks requiring them to apply information from a text, whereas tasks on general comprehension were completed by 87% and 80% respectively [6, p. 129]. Students confidently locate explicitly stated information but struggle when they need to read "between the lines", compare sources and express a reasoned position.

The literature lesson has particular potential in this respect. A literary text is polysemous, contains subtext and offers no ready-made answers; it therefore requires exactly the skills that PISA assesses. However, as PISA-2018 data show, students' experience with texts is often limited to fiction, whereas the best results are associated precisely with work on non-continuous texts (tables, charts, diagrams) [9]. Hence the task of combining the analysis of a literary work with international-format tasks.

The aim of the article is to substantiate and describe a system of PISA-style tasks for developing reading literacy of high school students in literature lessons (based on A.P. Chekhov's play "The Seagull").

To achieve this aim, the following **objectives were set:**

1. To clarify the content of the concept of "reading literacy" in the PISA framework.
2. To describe the types of PISA tasks and the possibilities of adapting them to the literature lesson.
3. To develop a sample system of tasks based on a dramatic work.

The term "reading literacy" emerged in 1991 in the context of international testing [4; 9]. In PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), which the OECD conducts among 15-year-old students, reading literacy is defined as an individual's capacity to understand, use, reflect on and engage with written texts in order to achieve one's goals, develop one's knowledge and potential, and participate in society [11].

Three aspects of this definition are important. First, reading is understood as an activity rather than a technique. Second, reflection - that is, the ability to make sense of and evaluate what has been read - comes to the fore. Third, reading is linked to the reader's personal and social goals. G.A. Tsukerman emphasises that the ability to independently extract and rethink information must be taught purposefully: it does not arise on its own [7, p. 50].

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The PISA framework identifies three groups of reading skills [9; 11]:

	Skill group	**What the reader does**	**Example of an activity in a literature lesson**
1.	Accessing and retrieving information	Locates explicitly stated information, details and facts	Find a stage direction; identify the time and place of the action
2.	Integrating and interpreting	Connects parts of the text, extracts implicit information, draws conclusions	Explain the subtext of a line or the meaning of a symbol
3.	Reflecting and evaluating	Relates the text to personal experience, evaluates content and form	Express a reasoned attitude to a character's position; evaluate the ending

In the methodological literature, these three groups are sometimes broken down into five: perception; understanding and interpretation; reflection and integration; generalisation and analysis; evaluation [9]. This division is convenient for the literature teacher, as it allows questions about a text to be arranged in order of increasing complexity.

An important feature of PISA is work with different text formats: ***continuous*** (made up of sentences and paragraphs), ***non-continuous*** (tables, charts, diagrams, posters) and ***mixed***. Tasks are placed in various contexts: personal, public, educational and occupational [9; 11].

It should be noted that PISA is not a universal instrument. Researchers point out that it does not take into account the national specifics of humanities education, aesthetic perception and creativity, and that some tasks are imprecisely worded [3; 6]. Therefore, the point is not "teaching to the test", but the creative adaptation of PISA principles to the objectives of the literature lesson.

Types of PISA-style tasks and their adaptation to the literature lesson

PISA reading tasks differ from traditional school questions in three respects. They are built around a real-life or educational situation, draw on several texts in different formats, and require not reproduction but a reasoned judgement [5; 11].

By response format, the following types of tasks are distinguished:

- multiple-choice tasks (with one or several correct answers);
- matching and sequencing tasks;
- "true / false / not stated in the text" tasks;
- short open-response tasks (a word, a quotation, a single sentence);
- extended-response tasks requiring text-based argumentation.

The last type is the most valuable for the literature lesson. I.V. Ryzhkova and S.A. Tolstenko show how a traditional task such as "circle the number of the correct answer" is transformed into a PISA-style task: the student is given a statement and asked to find evidence in the text that supports or refutes it, with quotations [6, p. 128]. This transformation moves the work from the first level of skills to the second and third.

When adapting PISA tasks to the literature lesson, we propose observing the following principles:

1. *The principle of situational context.* The task includes a context: preparing a school play, writing a review for the school newspaper, a debate on social media.
2. *The principle of multiple sources.* The literary text is supplemented with non-continuous and related texts: a table, a playbill, an excerpt from the writer's letter, a critical article.
3. *The principle of graded levels.* Questions on a single text are arranged from locating information to evaluating it.
4. *The principle of textual argumentation.* Every judgement a student makes is supported by a quotation or a reference to a passage.
5. *The principle of preserving aesthetic specificity.* Work with information does not displace the perception of the artistic image, subtext and the author's position.

It is advisable to integrate PISA-style tasks into the technology of meaningful reading with its three stages: pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading work [9]. At the first stage, tasks on making predictions from the title and the list of characters are appropriate; at the second, tasks on locating and interpreting information; at the third, tasks on evaluation and transfer to a new situation. To increase motivation, they can be combined with game-based and dialogic techniques:

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"Corners", "Create a Quiz", "Thick and Thin Questions", "Fishbone", and the cinquain [4; 9].

A system of PISA-style tasks based on A.P. Chekhov's play "The Seagull"

The choice of "The Seagull" is not accidental. A dramatic text is in itself a mixed text: it consists of a list of characters, lines of dialogue and stage directions. Chekhov's subtext, pauses and the recurring symbol of the seagull require interpretation rather than retelling from the reader. Finally, the play's stage history (its failure at the Alexandrinsky Theatre and its success at the Moscow Art Theatre) provides material for non-continuous texts.

Below is an example of a task block for grades 10-11. Situation: *the class is preparing to stage excerpts from "The Seagull" for the school theatre day and is compiling a programme for the audience*.

Text 1 (continuous). Excerpts from the play: the beginning of Act One (the dialogue between Masha and Medvedenko, with the line "I am in mourning for my life. I am unhappy"), the scene with the dead seagull in Act Two, and Nina's final monologue in Act Four ("I am a seagull. No, that's not it. I am an actress"; "Know how to bear your cross and have faith") [10].

Text 2 (non-continuous). Table "The first productions of 'The Seagull'":

Parameter	Alexandrinsky Theatre (St Petersburg)	Moscow Art Theatre
Premiere date	17 October 1896	17 December 1898
Actress playing Nina	V.F. Komissarzhevskaya	M.L. Roksanova
Direction	traditional, with an emphasis on external action	K.S. Stanislavsky, Vl.I. Nemirovich-Danchenko; attention to mood and pauses
Audience reception	failure	success; the seagull became the theatre's emblem

Tasks for Texts 1-2:

No.	Task	Skill group	Response format
	Using the table, state how much time passed between the two premieres.	Accessing and retrieving information	Short answer
	Decide whether the statements are true: a) Trigorin kills the seagull; b) the play is designated a "comedy"; c) at the Moscow Art Theatre, the role of Nina was played by Komissarzhevskaya.	Accessing and retrieving information	"True / false"
	Why does Nina begin the phrase "I am a seagull" and immediately correct herself? What changes in her sense of self?	Interpreting	Extended response
	Connect the scene with the dead seagull and Nina's final monologue. How does the seagull symbol develop?	Integrating	Extended response
	Using the table, put forward a hypothesis: why did the play fail at one theatre and succeed at the other? Support your answer with observations on the text of the play (pauses, stage directions, subtext).	Integrating and evaluating	Extended response
	Chekhov called "The Seagull" a comedy. Do you agree with this genre designation? Give two arguments from the text.	Evaluating	Extended response

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	Write a blurb (5-7 sentences) for the school play's programme that will interest peers who have not read the play.	Application in a new situation	Text creation

Tasks 1-2 test careful reading and the ability to navigate a non-continuous text. In Task 2, statements "a" and "c" are deliberately false (Treplev kills the seagull, and Komissarzhevskaya performed at the Alexandrinsky Theatre): they reveal superficial reading. Tasks 3-4 require work with subtext and symbol. Tasks 5-6 develop critical thinking and the ability to compare sources. Task 7 transfers what has been read into a real communicative situation.

Assessment criteria. For extended-response tasks, a three-point scale close to the PISA criteria is proposed:

- **2 points** - a meaningful answer is given, and the judgement is supported by at least two textual arguments;
- **1 point** - the answer is essentially correct, but the argumentation is incomplete or not based on the text;
- **0 points** - a retelling instead of an answer to the question, an incorrect interpretation, or no answer.

Reading literacy as understood by PISA is not a reading technique but the ability to locate, interpret and evaluate information from texts in various formats and to use it to solve real-life problems. The low results of Uzbek students in PISA-2022 show that these skills need to be developed purposefully, including in literature lessons.

PISA-style tasks combine naturally with the analysis of a literary work if the principles of situational context, multiple sources, graded levels, textual argumentation and preservation of the aesthetic specificity of literature are observed. The proposed system of tasks based on A.P. Chekhov's play "The Seagull" leads students from locating explicit information to interpreting subtext and symbol, and then to independently evaluating the work and creating their own text.

Prospects for further research include experimental validation of the task system, its extension to other works in the school curriculum, and its adaptation to schools with Uzbek as the language of instruction.

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