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SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE SCOPE OF READING LITERACY AND COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

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Abstract. This article discusses reading and reading literacy, the current scope of reading literacy, and provides recommendations for developing pupils reading literacy and their engagement with texts. It also explores strategies for reading comprehension and offers insights into how these can be cultivated.

Key words: reading literacy, international assessment programs, PISA, text, comprehension, reading comprehension, competence, linguistic knowledge, questioning, summarizing, drawing conclusions, story map, graphic organizers, skill, proficiency, outcome.

In today's rapidly evolving era, the state and society face modern demands that are growing in both urgency and scope. To achieve ambitious strategic goals, reach new milestones, and secure a place among developed nations, the role of highly capable, knowledgeable, and experienced professionals—who possess a modern mindset—is indispensable. To realize this objective, our country, much like others around the world, is undertaking extensive research and persistent efforts. A clear example of this is the adoption of advanced international practices—identified through the monitoring and evaluation of education and science sectors abroad—to enhance the quality of education at home. Currently, there are several international programs, such as PISA, PIRLS, TIMSS, and TALIS, which serve as widely recognized benchmarks for assessing the quality of education in developed countries. Among these, PISA—conducted every three years—evaluates the functional literacy of 15-year-old students across various nations. This includes their proficiency in reading, mathematics, and the natural sciences, as well as their competence in areas such as computer, financial, and global literacy, and their ability to apply knowledge in practical, real-world contexts. PISA was first implemented among students in 2000. In our country, alongside other international assessment programs, efforts are underway to ensure regular participation in PISA studies and to achieve high results. This includes developing new strategies and methods—and incorporating tasks based on them into textbooks and educational materials. The goal of participating in this program is not merely to conduct tests, but rather to foster 21st-century skills in our children and lay the foundation for developing intellectual talent.

In this article, we will explore the concept of "reading literacy"—introduced to our country through the PISA framework—as well as its scope and the strategies that teach students to comprehend texts and reflect on their content. In today's world, where a rapid influx of information envelops the human mind like a spider's web, it is essential for individuals to possess a deep grasp of "reading literacy"—both to protect themselves and to achieve their goals, regardless of the field in which they seek to gain knowledge and experience. So, what exactly is "reading literacy"? What level of knowledge and skills are students expected to possess today when we speak of "reading literacy"? To address this, I would first like to offer some thoughts on the concept of "literacy" (*savodxonlik*). The term is rooted in the word *savod*, which is defined in the *Explanatory

Dictionary of the Uzbek Language* as follows: *savod*—the ability to read and write; written text; the skill of literacy.

Its meanings include: 1) familiarity with reading and writing; 2) the essential knowledge or information required in a specific field; and 3) knowledge, understanding, or experience in general. Related forms include *savodli* (literate), *savodlilik* (literacy/being literate), *savodxon* (literate person), and *savodxonlik* (literacy).

Meanings of "savodlilik" (literacy): 1. One of the indicators of a population's cultural level: the ability to read simple texts, or the possession of skills to both read and write. 2. An individual's proficiency in oral and written speech that conforms to the norms of the standard (literary) language. 3. Possession of sufficient knowledge in a specific field—for example, technical literacy, legal literacy, or medical literacy (*Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language*, Vol. 3, p. 416). The term *savodxonlik* can be used as a synonym for *savodlilik*. Reading literacy, specifically, refers to an individual's ability to understand and utilize texts, expand their knowledge and capabilities, and participate effectively in social life to achieve their personal goals.

Reading is not merely the act of combining letters to form words or reading aloud; rather, it involves engaging deeply with a text to derive meaning from it. Through the development of reading literacy, learners acquire skills such as locating and extracting information from a text, interpreting content, drawing upon external knowledge, comprehending and evaluating material, and grasping the overall substance of a text. In a broader sense, reading literacy is a comprehensive concept that entails purposeful engagement grounded in careful, thorough examination. The objective in this area is to assess students' competencies in engaging with a diverse range of materials—such as excerpts from literary works, biographies, letters, documents, articles from newspapers and journals, various manuals, and geographical maps—which may also include diagrams, illustrations, and tables designed to clarify the text. This involves the ability to comprehend the content, reflect upon it, evaluate its substance, and express personal opinions regarding what has been read. Reading literacy encompasses three components: the situation, the text, and the reading skill. Texts are situated within specific contexts, which are categorized into personal, social, educational, and official domains. Reading skills rely on both the text itself and external (prior) knowledge.

Relying on the text entails locating and extracting information, as well as synthesizing and interpreting the message contained within it; conversely, relying on external knowledge involves understanding and evaluating the text based on its content and form. In essence, reading is not merely the act of consuming provided information; it is a process that requires understanding the underlying purpose and actively processing the content—connecting ideas, clarifying concepts, and supplementing the information derived from the text. Reading literacy is the development of the ability to comprehend, analyze, and evaluate information derived from a text, to draw conclusions, and to independently assess the validity of those conclusions. To read effectively, one must understand what is being read; otherwise, the act of reading loses its purpose. It is well established that the process of "comprehension" is a complex mental activity influenced by both psychological and pedagogical factors. The term "comprehension" is intrinsically linked to the widely accepted concept of "reading comprehension," which requires the integration of a reader's existing knowledge with information extracted from the text. Many scholars who have studied reading comprehension emphasize that this cognitive process is not merely a purposeful and active aspect of life, but a multi-stage activity. The ability to comprehend what is being read involves extracting the content of a text and perceiving or grasping what the author intends to convey. Reading comprehension serves as a foundation for the generation of new ideas. To develop students' reading

literacy, a teacher must, first and foremost, be able to teach them how to reflect on the text they read—that is, to employ comprehension strategies. According to educational experts, there are 205 significant studies globally concerning comprehension strategies. Further analysis of this research has identified six core comprehension strategies—widely recognized in the literature—that can enable students to read independently and analyze the information they encounter. These are: questioning, monitoring, summarizing, story mapping, graphic organizers, and generating questions. Below, we provide a brief description of how each strategy can assist students.

Asking and answering questions. This strategy teaches students self-regulation. By asking themselves questions, they can reflect on the text and attempt to recall information or identify specific answers. This may also involve teaching students to use various types of inquiries—such as who, what, when, where, why, and how—or to focus on and contemplate specific pieces of information. During a lesson, teachers may pose questions to students, or facilitate a process where students ask and answer questions among themselves.

Monitoring. This is a comprehension strategy that enables students to self-assess—that is, to gauge their own level of understanding of a text. If a student does not comprehend what they are reading, they must take steps to clarify the information. Such measures might include rereading the text, reflecting on prior knowledge, examining illustrations, or seeking assistance.

Generalizing or summarizing. This teaches students how to condense a text down to its most essential elements. The strategy involves showing students how to select key information—ignoring what is unimportant—and restating the content in their own words. This process requires identifying the core idea or concept conveyed by the text and engaging in critical reflection. Students may summarize the text multiple times as they read, or they may arrive at a single, comprehensive summary at the end.

Story mapping. This helps students understand the structure and organization of a text. Stories often include elements such as the setting, the protagonist, a central problem, attempts to resolve that problem, and the final outcome. Mapping out a text in this way is highly effective for synthesizing information, grasping the content, and drawing conclusions.

Graphic organizers. These utilize visual aids to help students comprehend a text. Examples of graphic organizers include hierarchical trees and Venn diagrams.

Generating questions. Students should formulate questions before, during, and after reading. This practice facilitates the processing of the text and helps students monitor their own understanding. Asking questions while reading facilitates students' comprehension of the material and encourages them to engage in the integration of ideas. A teacher can structure this process by providing the following guidance: 1) The teacher reads a passage from the text aloud. 2) The teacher pauses and models the types of questions students might ask—for example: "Why did the author say this?", "What is the most important idea?", or "Are there any facts that clarify the content of the text?" The teacher uses various texts to demonstrate (model) the process. Reading for comprehension, reflecting on a text, and making decisions based on it are essential skills for individuals in any field. In facilitating this, the teacher’s experience and dedicated effort play a paramount role. Specifically, to effectively convey reading comprehension strategies to students and achieve the desired outcomes, we must focus on the following:

1. Set clear goals for students and ensure they understand them.
2. Present a well-structured sequence of tasks.
3. Provide clear, concise explanations and illustrations related to the topic.
4. Frequently ask questions to gauge whether students have understood the task.
5. Give students ample opportunities to apply what they have learned.

Comprehending what we read is the most critical part of the reading process. Only when students consciously integrate their own thinking with the content can they transform this information into knowledge. Comprehension strategies enable students to think, ask questions, and synthesize information... ...and is a means of achieving understanding. Integrating instruction on content with instruction on comprehension helps students grasp the subject matter and provides meaning and purpose to specific strategies.

In short, to enable students today to cope with the challenges of an increasingly complex world—and to transform the information they read into knowledge that they can actively apply—it is essential that we teach them comprehension strategies.

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