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### **Teaching reading skills in English to the middle school students (A2 level)**

#### **Annotation**

*Main problem:* The article examines the issues concerning teaching reading skills to the middle school students according to the updated program.

*Purpose:* The article analyses the course book "Excel" for 7<sup>th</sup> grade students on teaching reading skills.

*Methods:* The criteria of analyzing the course book contain the forms of text presentation, types and situations modeled by the text, compliance with the level of English proficiency, age of students, information content, and accessibility. It also includes assessment of course book texts for the development of reading for general understanding of information (skimming), for identifying details (scanning) and reading with full comprehension, as well as for the different types of tasks for reading.

*Results and their significance:* The texts in the course book correspond to the age characteristics of adolescents, the level of English language proficiency (A2) and are developed according to the standard curriculum. The most popular forms of text presentation are popular science texts and information about public events. The situations in the texts are dominated by educational, most of all the mixed type of text prevailed. There is a balance for the types of tasks developing reading for general understanding and reading for identifying details which leads to the development of functional reading literacy. The types of reading tasks used are quite diverse and contribute the development of communicative skills (pair work, group work, etc.). The misbalance of tasks on developing low order and high order thinking skills can be solved through adding some tasks developing HOTS.

*Key words:* Middle school, functional literacy, English, reading skills, HOTS.

#### **Introduction**

The current situation in the educational system of Kazakhstan revealed a number of problems, including an insufficient level of reading not only in the native language, but also in English.

Kazakhstani schoolchildren showed below average results of tests in the framework of the international program for the assessment of educational achievements of students (PISA). In the PISA-2018 ranking, Kazakhstan scored 423 points in mathematics (taking 53<sup>rd</sup> place), 387 points in reading (69<sup>th</sup> place) and 397 points in natural sciences (68<sup>th</sup> place).

Thus there is an urgent need to develop the functional literacy which is considered as the ability to use all acquired knowledge, abilities and skills to solve the widest possible range of life tasks in various spheres of human activity, communication and social relations [1]. Reading literacy as a part of functional literacy is one of the main characteristics necessary for self-development and self-education of students.

One of the ways to change the situation in the field of functional literacy development in Kazakhstan is the updated curriculum. It aims to build 21<sup>st</sup> century qualities and skills in students, such as critical thinking and the development of functional literacy.

The aim of the article is to analyze the English course book "Excel" for grade 7 in terms of the development of the functional literacy. The course book has been developed in accordance with the curriculum of the updated educational content. The main focus is reading skills and how this skill is reflected at the course book.

According to the researchers, reading literacy is defined as the learner's ability to understand, use, reflect and work with written texts to achieve their goals, develop their knowledge and potential, and participate in the life of society [2; 29].

Thus reading is about understanding written texts. It is a complex activity that involves both perception and thought. Reading consists of two related processes: word recognition and comprehension. Word recognition refers to the process of perceiving how written symbols correspond to one's spoken language. Comprehension is the process of making sense of words, sentences and connected text. Readers typically make use of background knowledge, vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, experience with text and other strategies to help them understand written text [3; 6].

In other words, learning to read is an important educational goal. For both children and adults, the ability to read opens up new worlds and opportunities. It enables us to gain new knowledge, enjoy literature, and do everyday things that are part and parcel of modern life, such as, reading the newspapers, job listings, instruction manuals, maps and so on. Most people learn to read in their native language without difficulty. Many,

but not all, learn to read as children. Some children and adults need additional help. Yet others learn to read a second, third or additional language, with or without having learned to read in their first language. Reading instruction needs to take into account different types of learners and their needs. Research has shown that there is a great deal of transfer from learning to read in one language to learning to read in a second language [3; 6].

As G. Dean noted in contrast to learning grammar, improving pronunciation, vocabulary, writing skills, reading has a unique feature. During reading, students interact not only with the direct language of instruction, but also with the information presented in the text [4]. This means that they acquire new knowledge, get acquainted with facts from different spheres and someone else's point of view regarding any issues. The information presented in the text can relate to a wide variety of aspects of human life: from the description of the emotional interaction of people in works of art and the narration of historical events, to the explanation of scientific concepts and cultural and social phenomena [4]. For instance, children and adults who are learning to read in a language different from their native language will also need to learn about the culture of the second or foreign language. Because texts are written with a specific audience in mind, cultural knowledge is present in texts and it is assumed that the reader is familiar with such knowledge [3; 6-7].

British methodologist Penny Ur underlines some characteristics of teenagers influencing their learning in general. The learning potential of adolescents is greater than that of young children, and they are beginning to use more conscious, explicit strategies for language learning. For example you can start to use explanation of grammatical rules with them. There is an added factor of adolescent-specific problems of identity, relationships, physical change and so on, which make it more difficult for them to concentrate [5; 264].

In other words, different approaches to teaching reading in a foreign language reflect not only general trends in the theory of learning and teaching a language, but also the development of reading theories, which include new psycholinguistic approaches, interactive models, and social and critical theories about reading. All of these approaches were developed with a pragmatic goal of creating an effective foreign language reader [6].

Penny Ur notes that effective reading includes several features: motivation of readers to read, their awareness of the purpose of reading, the use of different strategies for reading different texts, the availability and use of basic information, prediction, selective attention to finding the main ideas in the text, clear language and content, automatic recognition of common phrases. To help learners become effective foreign language readers, teachers can encourage them to have more successful reading experiences, give them interesting pre-reading tasks, and give them time to read [5; 143].

In addition to the cognitively complex activity of reading itself, the learners have to take on the requirements of achieving comprehension and negotiating meaning in a language that is not their mother tongue. For them, the natural enjoyment and fulfillment of automatic reading and reading for pleasure must come second to the practical demands of interpreting the different possibilities of grammar, syntax, structure, and genre. The process of acquiring second language reading skills in English is made even more taxing for students such as those in Korea, whose indigenous script is made up of non-roman characters (e.g. Korean Hangul, Hebrew, Arabic, Bengali, Indian, and Cyrillic) [7].

#### Materials and methods

In order to achieve the aim of the research the criteria for evaluating the course book "Excel" for students in grade 7 in English have been developed. The main emphasis was placed on the formation of the ability to read in English. We studied the content of the English course book "Excel" for 7th grade students developed by the British methodologists Virginia Evans, Jenny Dooley and Bob Obi at Express Publishing (Almaty).

In our analysis, we relied on the requirements presented in the report on the results of the international research PISA-2015. As a result, nineteen criteria were developed (Table 1). The criteria contain the forms of text presentation, types and situations modeled by the text, compliance with the level of English proficiency, age of students, information content, and accessibility. It also includes assessment of course book texts for the development of reading for general understanding of information (skimming), for identifying details (scanning) and reading with full reading comprehension (reading for detailed comprehension), as well as for the types of tasks used including thinking skills tasks according to the Bloom's taxonomy.

Table 1 – Evaluation criteria for English course book "Excel" for teaching reading for students in grade 7

Assessment criterion for a course book on the formation of reading skills	1 matches	2 partially matches	3 does not match
1. Formsof textpresentation:			
-fiction	✓		
- popularsciencetexts	✓		
- officialdocuments			
- informationaboutpublicevents	✓		

Continue of the table 1

2. Situation -personal -public - educational - business	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	
3. Type of text -linear - non-linear -mixed -composite	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	
4. Reading texts correspond to the theme of the calendar-thematic plan	✓		
5. The reading texts correspond to the students' level of English proficiency: Grade 7 - A2 level	✓		
6. Reading texts are age-appropriate	✓		
7. Reading texts generate interest and motivation for learners to learn	✓		
8. The amount of text to read is consistent with the objectives of the assignment	✓		
9. Information content(there is new information for students in the text)		✓	
10. Availability of information: - accessible language of the text, - clarity, intelligibility in presentation	✓		
11. Highlighted keywords available		✓	
12. There is a glossary / word bank for better understanding of the text	✓		
13. There are graphic organizers for better understanding of the text: - Images - Pictures - Diagrams - Tables - Schemes - Maps	✓ ✓		✓
14. Reading texts are aimed at developing the following reading skills: - reading for general understanding of information / skimming (reading for gist)	✓		
15. The text is aimed at developing the following reading skills: - Reading to identify details / scanning	✓		
16. The text is aimed at developing the following reading skills: - reading with a full understanding of the content, including details / reading for detailed comprehension	✓		
17. Types of reading assignments: Match the headings with the paragraphs True or false Multiple choice Open-ended questions Put the paragraphs into the correct order Missing sentences Complete the sentences about the text Vocabulary in a text The writer's opinion or reader's response	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	
18. Does the course book contain the following steps for a reading task: - pre-reading task	✓ ✓		

Continue of the table 1

-while –reading task - post – reading task	✓		
19. Bloom’s Taxonomy Tasks for the development of HOTS/LOTS skills		✓	

### Results

After analyzing the content of the eight modules of the English coursebook "Excel" for students in grade 7, we came to the following conclusions. The texts in the course book correspond to the age characteristics of adolescents, the level of English language proficiency (A2) and are developed according to the standard curriculum.

The most popular forms of text presentation are popular science texts and information about public events. The situations in the texts are dominated by educational, regarding the types of texts were used all, but most of all the mixed type of text prevailed.

The balance of tasks for the development of reading for general understanding and reading for identifying details (24-30) contribute to the development of students' ability to extract and use material from the texts in accordance with the goals of the given tasks. As it's well known these skills are key to developing reading literacy.

As for the types of reading tasks used, they are quite diverse. So, the coursebook presents tasks for finding true and false statements, tasks for multiple choice, tasks in which a detailed answer is required, and tasks in which it is required to find a word in the text and compare headings with paragraphs, which allows students to find out if understanding has been achieved, as well as developing reading skills.

The presence of tasks for the development of higher order skills (HOTS) contribute to the development of critical thinking skills, which is the goal of the national updated educational program. But the imbalance of tasks for the formation of skills of a higher order, which is more than 20% in the 7th grade coursebook (84-24), speaks of its lack and may affect the development of students' skills in arguing, analyzing and developing creativity.

Reading tasks include real life situations that students may face in the future. The texts of the coursebook also contain linguistic and cultural information and it can be comparable with the information of other subjects.

### Discussion

In the English textbook "Excel", the ratio of tasks for the formation of reading skills is distributed with an emphasis on the development of reading for details (scanning). The ability to understand what you read, find and extract the necessary information from the general context, use it, reflect and reason your answer are key aspects of PISA and affect reading literacy, which is one of the most important characteristics necessary for self-development and self-education of students. It'll be effective for the formation of reading skills that other school subjects could predominantly develop scanning at their lessons including integrated lessons (e.g. Biology in English, etc.).

The use of three types of tasks - pre, while and post - allow students to better understand the meaning of what they read. After all, the pre-reading tasks help students prepare for reading and motivate them to read, while the post - reading tasks help to understand how students have mastered the text.

There is an imbalance in the number of tasks aimed at developing lower-order skills (LOTS) and higher-order skills (HOTS). English language teachers should pay close attention to this fact, since such an imbalance can lead to the inability of students to think critically.

### Conclusion

Thus, the analysis of the English coursebook "Excel" for grade 7 with the help of the assessment criteria shows how effectively reading skills are developed according to the updated content of education for middle school students. The texts from the course book basically match to the criteria of the analysis including the forms of text presentation, types and situations modeled by the text, compliance with the level of English proficiency, age of students, information content, and accessibility. It also contributes to the development of reading for general understanding of information (skimming), for identifying details (scanning) and reading for detailed comprehension), as well as to the types of tasks.

The English course book "Excel" for grade 7 develops reading skills of the learners in accordance with the modern methodology of the English language teaching for teenagers. The use of the course book together with additional teaching materials will help learners in their reading and comprehension of texts of different genres and subjects.

## THE LIST OF SOURCES

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### **Орта мектеп оқушыларын ағылшын тіліне оқытуға үйрету ерекшеліктері (тіл деңгейі А2)**

Мақалада жаңартылған бағдарлама бойынша орта мектеп оқушыларын оқу дағдыларына үйрету мәселелері қарастырылады. Мақалада 7-сынып оқушыларын оқу дағдыларына үйрету бойынша «Excel» курстық кітабы талданған. Курстық кітапты талдау критерийлерінде мәтінді ұсыну формалары, мәтінмен моделінде берілген типтер мен жағдайлар, ағылшын тілін білу деңгейіне сәйкестігі, оқушылардың жас мөлшері, ақпарат мазмұны және қол жетімділік бар. Оған ақпараттарды жалпы түсіну үшін оқуды дамытуға (скиммингке), егжей-тегжейлерді анықтауға (сканерлеуге) және толық түсініп оқуға арналған оқудың дамуы үшін, сонымен қатар оқуға арналған тапсырмалардың әр түрлі түрлері үшін курстық кітап мәтіндерін бағалау кіреді. Курстық кітаптағы мәтіндер жасөспірімдердің жас ерекшеліктеріне, ағылшын тілін білу деңгейіне (А2) сәйкес келеді және типтік оқу жоспарына сәйкес әзірленген. Мәтінді ұсынудың ең танымал формалары - ғылыми-көпшілік және бұқаралық іс-шаралар туралы ақпараттық мәтіндер. Мәтіндердегі жағдаяттар негізінен білім беруде басым, көбінесе аралас мәтін түрі болды. Функционалды оқу сауаттылығының дамытатын жағдайларды анықтау үшін жалпы түсіну үшін оқуды дамытатын тапсырма түрлері үшін тепе-теңдік бар. Оқу тапсырмаларының түрлері коммуникативті және әр түрлі дағдыларды дамытуға ықпал етеді (жұптық, топтық жұмыс және т.б.). Төмен тәртiптi және жоғары ойлау қабiлеттерiн дамыту бойынша тапсырмалардың теңгерiмсiздiгiн ЖБТ-ны дамытатын кейбiр тапсырмаларды бiрiктiру арқылы шешуге болады.

Түйін сөздер: функционалды сауаттылық, орта мектеп, ағылшын тілі.

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### **Особенности обучения чтению на английском языке учащихся средних классов (уровень языка А2)**

В статье рассматриваются вопросы обучения навыкам чтения учащихся средних классов по обновленной программе, анализируется учебник «Excel» для учащихся 7-х классов по обучению

навыкам чтения. Критерии анализа учебника содержат формы изложения текста, типы и ситуации, моделируемые текстом, соответствие уровню владения английским языком, возрасту студентов, информационному наполнению и доступности. Он также включает оценку текстов учебников для развития чтения, общего понимания информации (беглый просмотр), выявления деталей (сканирование) и чтения с полным пониманием, а также для различных типов заданий по чтению. Тексты в учебнике соответствуют возрастным характеристикам подростков, уровню владения английским языком (A2) и разработаны по стандартной учебной программе. Популярными формами подачи текстов являются научные тексты и информация о массовых мероприятиях. В текстах преобладают учебные ситуации, тип текста – преимущественно смешанный. Существует баланс между типами задач, развивающих чтение для общего понимания и чтение для выявления деталей, что приводит к развитию функциональной грамотности. Типы заданий, используемых для чтения, довольно разнообразны и способствуют развитию коммуникативных навыков: работе в паре, в группе и т.п. Несбалансированность задач по развитию навыков мышления низкого и высокого порядка может быть решена путем добавления некоторых задач по развитию НОТ.

Ключевые слова: функциональная грамотность, навыки чтения, английский язык, научная организация труда.

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