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НАУЧНЫЙ ЖУРНАЛ  
Торайғыров университета

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## **ENGLISH PROFICIENCY READING SKILLS AT THE AGE OF 12 IN PAVLODAR REGION, KAZAKHSTAN**

*The purpose of this paper is to explore the level of reading literacy of 12-year old students in Pavlodar because reading plays one of the important parts in the development of academic and intellectual processes of human beings.*

*This work examined a pilot study of young language learners' proficiency reading skills in English (L3 – compulsory foreign language) with a previous language background (L1 – Kazakh language is a mother tongue) and L2 (Russian language is a language of everyday communication) in Pavlodar, Kazakhstan. The quantitative methods was used in the secondary school No.22 of Pavlodar, the participants were 57 students of the 6th grade, the instruments were presented in the form of Reading test with 4 tasks and 24 items; the questions belonged to the information retrieval and inferring item types.*

*After analyzing a short small-scale study of reading skills in English of 12-year old children showed significantly higher ability in retrieving information from texts than from graphs. However, the findings of Cronbach's alpha was not high at the beginning but while analyzing data further we found out that in case of deleting some items the Cronbach's alpha became higher.*

*This implication would let us suppose to the idea that because of little time, distance in conducting paper-and-pencil test we were not familiar with the exact language level of the students while performing the test and if the teacher instructed the students well. Therefore, we assume that these factors affected on the reliability of the test. Hence, we consider that the test further should be corrected or changed into standardized test in L3 or translated into their mother tongue.*

*Keywords: Reading literacy, English proficiency, information retrieval and inference items, language level, teaching and learning.*

## **Introduction**

As Kazakhstan has actively started since 2009 taking part in the Program for International Students Assessment (PISA) a great glance and attention have been turned into the performance, proficiency, and development of three main domains (Reading, Mathematics, and Science) among young language learners. According to Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) [2], reading literacy is «an individual's capacity to understand, use, reflect on and engage with written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society» [2, P. 51].

Thus, the main aim of this study is, generally to investigate the niche of young learners' lower results in reading literacy, particularly to find out what issues prevent to improve reading level as well as trying to increase English proficiency reading skills in the context of Kazakhstan.

## **Theoretical background**

In order to be familiar with a written text to understand it and even use it in everyday life Pourcin et al. [3], denote that «...both oral comprehension skills and word-level reading skills are required. The process of comprehension is considered to be largely amodal: that is, it is similar regardless of mode of presentation (written or oral)» [3, P. 24]. Thus, we consider that reading literacy not only requires reading skills in written form but also listening skills as the person obtains oral information as well while interacting with the society.

In later childhood a reader has to be «fluent in decoding and recognizing words, continually expand their vocabulary and knowledge base, and learn to use elaborate cognitive strategies to make inferences and analyze text critically» [6, p. 191]. Otherwise, problems in reading skills can cause a number of difficulties in students' achievements and just cease some process in the way of thinking or solving simple problems. Furthermore, Wigfield et al. [6] consider that reading literacy is vitally important in all part of human's life as being proficient in reading leads you into prosperity. This also has been proved by Hulme & Snowling [1], denoting that «Learning to read is a key objective of early education and difficulties in learning to read can have serious adverse consequences» [1, P. 1].

English proficiency reading skills among young language learners is under the focus on our research as English is an international and widely used language in the world, because people not only know English language as a foreign but also interact with the foreigners under the basis of their reading literacy. This is because «Reading strategies are associated with different aspects of language learning and cognitive processes, and the effects can only be observed if reading becomes a habit» [5, P. 61].

In addition, Rocío Ríos & Valcárcel Goyeneche [5] define that while learning a foreign language the teacher has to know what the students' interest are in

order to get enough input of young language learners. For instance, Protacio [4] differentiates five motivational factors influencing in English reading process as a foreign language. First, social cultural environment – as surrounding and society generally influence person’s ability to learn and know more; second, integrative orientation – the way of making friend with foreign peers while learning a new language or while integrating into a new culture; third, an instrumental motivation is when the learners realize the importance of reading as they start to understand that reading will provide them the information of learning; forth, perceptive competence – this is the students’ abilities that is related to motivation to read in English; fifth, reading materials not only teachers but the parents themselves have to be interested in what their child is reading or has read as this creates interest that is also pays an important part in motivation of reading literacy. Taking into account all above mentioned eight research questions were made and analysed further:

- 1 What is the students’ performance in information retrieval?
- 2 What do they understand better while collecting information, from graphs or texts?
- 3 How well can students infer from reading?
- 4 Which one do they perform better, inferring from graphs or texts?
- 5 Which one do they perform better, retrieving or inferring from graphs?
- 6 Which one do they perform better, retrieving or inferring from texts?
- 7 Do their retrieval and inference ability correlate?
- 7 What is the reliability of the test?

### **Methods**

The small-scale quantitative method was used and then organized by my colleague at Secondary School No. 22 in Pavlodar city, Kazakhstan. This school is a public Kazakh school thus, their mother tongue is Kazakh, the number of the participants was 57, and they were all 6th Grade students. The test has 4 tasks: task 1 is designed to examine students’ information retrieval abilities form Graphs; task 2 is about inferring from Graphs; task 3 targets students’ skills of collecting information from Text; and task 4 is related to inference from Text.

The items in Task 1 and Task 3 are subjective because the students have to understand the information from the graphs and text, and then fill the gaps in depending on presented details. Tasks 2 and 4 are objective because these tasks were in multiple choice formats thus students just only have to choose the letter among given.

The source for the first version of the instrument has been taken from Draft PISA 2015 Reading Framework as the suggestions and the main content of how, what and in what way does the test for Reading in English and Kazakh will be presented. The main purpose in PISA 2015 Reading Test is to check and reveal the students’ capability to solve simple life up to date problems and be able to smoothly participate in the well integrated society.

## Results

The analysis was conducted by Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program. Results for each research questions are presented below.

### ***Research question 1: What is the students' performance in information retrieval?***

Table 1 showed that the students' performance in Texts information retrieval is better than in Graphs. Standard deviation in Graphs is 16 %, and in Texts is 14 %. The percentage in Graphs information retrieval is 10 % lower than in the Texts, this means that Texts format of information retrieval items suits young language learners a little bit better than in Graphs.

Table 1 – Students' performance in Reading information retrieval

Task	M	SD	SE
Graphs Information retrieval	57.6 %	16 %	2 %
Texts Information retrieval	67.5 %	14 %	2 %

### ***Research question 2: What do they understand better while collecting information, from graphs or texts?***

In order to understand what students understand better while collecting information from Graphs or Texts paired sample t-test was done. Results have shown that students obtain significantly higher ability in retrieving information from Texts than from Graphs,  $t(56)=4,79$ ,  $p<.001$ .

### ***Research question 3: How well can students infer from reading?***

Table 2 illustrates how well students can infer from reading. As tasks 2 and 4 are concerned with the inferring items, we compared them both. Mean of inferring items of Graphs is 74 % and in Texts 51 %. It seems that inferring from Graphs is much easier than from Texts for 6th grade students.

In inference items of reading, students did well from graphs than from the texts reading. The percentile score between task 2 and task 4 is nearly 24 %. The type of the items in tasks 2 and 4 were presented in Multiple Choices and we suppose that multiple choices for young language learners are easy to solve as they do not have to add any additional information or complete the omission details they just have to choose among presented answers.

Table 2 – Students' performance in Reading inference

Task	Mean	Std. Error	Std. Deviation
Graphs Inferring	74,12 %	3,19 %	24,07 %
Texts Inferring	50,53 %	3,98 %	30,03 %

***Research question 4: Which one do they perform better, inferring from graphs or texts?***

Regarding research question No.4 paired samples t-test has shown that students obtain significantly higher ability in inferring from texts than from graphs,  $t(56)=6,03$ ,  $p<.001$ .

***Research question 5: Which one do they perform better, retrieving or inferring from graphs?***

Comparing retrieving or inferring tasks with graphs, we examine where the students perform better. Paired samples t-test has shown that students obtain significantly higher ability in multiple choices than in True or False judgment tasks with graphs,  $t(56)=4,82$ ,  $p<.001$ .

***Research question 6: Which one do they perform better, retrieving or inferring from texts?***

Paired samples t-test has shown that students obtain significantly higher ability in multiple choice than True or False judgment regarding the understanding of texts,  $t(56)=4,25$ ,  $p<.001$ . This proves that students perform better in inferring tasks than retrieving from the texts.

Research question 7: Do their retrieval and inference ability correlate?

In order to know the relation between students' abilities of retrieval and inferring items, we conducted a correlation analysis of the four tasks. From Pearson Correlations in Table 3, we can see that Task 1 is related to Task 3 and Task 4 with respectively medium correlation coefficients; Task 2 and Task 4 are also intermediately correlated. The strongest correlation is between Task 1 and Task 3 ( $r=.49$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

Table 3 – Correlations of Tasks

	Inference from Graphs	Information retrieval from Texts	Inference from Texts
Information retrieval from Graphs	.225	.490**	.355**
Inference from Graphs		.178	.421**
Information retrieval from Texts			.234
** $p<.01$			

***Research question 8: What is the reliability of the test?***

The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of the test is very low but if we delete 10 out of the 24 items, the reliability will be pretty much higher (Cronbach's alpha =.76), so we suppose that the created test has to be further corrected and some of the questions and items should be changed as well as the tasks.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Summarizing eight research questions, we found out that students have some problems in performing tasks with information retrieval items, in particular, from graphs, whereas in inferring items students showed better results in texts and in the graphs as well. Collecting information from the texts was easier for 6th grade students than from the graphs, as multiple choice formats seemed easy to solve. However, inferring from graphs was much higher than from the texts, but the strongest relationship was found among graphs and texts information retrieval. The reliability is also low because the test was presented in English language not in their mother tongue, if it will be in Kazakh language than the score of Cronbach's alpha will be much higher.

In addition to this, we did not have any information of the students' background as because of the lack of time and the distance of collecting it played a certain kind of negative role in collecting data. Firstly, we are not sure that the students were instructed well, whether all students understood the tasks of the tests. Secondly, we do not know whether conditions the students had while performing the test were suitable for them whether they did the test after, before, or in/during the class, and wouldn't be there any unexpected conditions and the time for the test was set and fixed for all equally.

Therefore, in the future we are going to conduct the test of reading by using standardized test in English and translate them in mother tongues (Kazakh or Russian) as well as add some questionnaire in order to investigate and be familiar with the background information of young learners in Pavlodar.

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**Павлодар облысының 12 жастағы мектеп оқушыларының ағылшын тіліндегі оқу қабілеті, Қазақстан**

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**Навыки чтения на английском языке у 12-летних школьников Павлодарской области, Казахстан**

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*Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты – Павлодардағы 12 жастағы оқушылардың оқу сауаттылық деңгейін зерттеу, өйткені оқу адамның академиялық және интеллектуалды процестерін дамытуда маңызды бөліктердің бірі болып табылады.*

*Мақалада 12 жастағы оқушылардың ағылшын тілінде (L3 – міндетті шетел тілі) оқу дағдыларын зерттеу сипатталған, мұнда L1 – қазақ тілі – ана тілі, ал L2 – орыс тілі – күнделікті қарым-қатынас тілі ретінде қарастырылды. Сандық әдіс Павлодар қаласындағы № 22 жалпы орта мектепте қолданылды, оған 6-сыныптың 57 оқушысы қатысты, оқу тесті 4 тапсырмадан және 24 сұрақпен ұсынылды, сұрақтар ақпараттық іздеу және мәтіннің логикалық қорытындысы түрлеріне қатысты болды.*

*12 жасар балалардың ағылшын тілінде оқу дағдыларын зерттеуді талдағаннан кейін графиктерден гөрі мәтіндерден ақпарат алудың едәуір жоғары қабілетін көрсетті. Алайда, сенімділік нәтижелері (Кронбах альфа) бастапқыда нашар болды, бірақ деректерді әрі қарай талдағанда, егер кейбір сұрақтар жойылса, Кронбах альфа (сенімділік) жоғарылағанын анықтадық.*

*Тест кезінде уақыт пен қашықтықтың шектеулі болуына байланысты біз сынақ кезінде оқушылардың тіл деңгейімен, сондай-ақ, мұғалімнің оқушыларға қалай нұсқау бергенімен жазбаша түрде таныс болмадық деп ойлаймыз. Сондықтан, бұл факторлар тестің сенімділігіне әсер етті. Демек, тест одан әрі түзетіліп немесе L3 стандартты тестке өзгертілуі немесе оқушылардың ана тіліне аударылуы керек деп санаймыз.*

*Кілтті сөздер: Оқу сауаттылығы, ағылшын тілін білу, ақпаратты іздеу және қорытындылау сұрақтары, тіл деңгейі, оқыту мен оқу.*

*Цель данной статьи – изучить уровень читательской грамотности у 12-летних учащихся г. Павлодара, поскольку чтение играет одну из важных ролей в развитии академических и интеллектуальных процессов человека.*

*В статье описано исследование навыков чтения у учащихся 12-летнего возраста на английском языке (L3 – обязательный иностранный язык), где L1 – казахский язык является родным языком, и L2 – русский язык – язык межнационального общения. Количественный метод использовался в средней общеобразовательной школе № 22 г. Павлодара, в нем приняли участие 57 учеников 6-го класса, инструменты были представлены в виде теста по чтению из*

*4 заданий и 24 вопросов, вопросы были представлены в виде поиска информации и логического заключения текста.*

*После анализа исследования навыков чтения на английском языке 12-летние школьники показали значительно высокую способность извлекать информацию из текстов, чем из графиков. Однако результаты надежности (Кронбах альфа) вначале были невысокими, но при дальнейшем анализе данных мы обнаружили, что в случае удаления некоторых вопросов Кронбах альфа (надежность) становилась выше.*

*Мы полагаем, что из-за ограниченного количества времени и расстояния при проведении теста письменно, мы не были знакомы с точным уровнем языка учащихся во время выполнения теста, а также с тем, как проинструктировал учитель учеников. Поэтому эти факторы повлияли на надежность теста. Следовательно, мы считаем, что в дальнейшем тест следует доработать или заменить на стандартный тест на L3 (английском языке) или перевести на родной язык обучающихся.*

*Ключевые слова: читательская грамотность, навыки владения английским языком, элементы поиска информации и логического заключения, уровень языка, преподавание и обучение.*

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