



ON THE ISSUE OF READING COMPETENCE AND HABITS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

A *Problems of students' reading are urgent ones for educators all over the world. Author pays her attention to reading as a source of getting knowledge to help person to orient in various spheres of life. From the point of view of a holistic approach in education reading correlates with speaking, writing, listening comprehension, and culture in general. The culture of reading is interconnected with the way we are brought up and the environment we are growing. Nowadays many researchers determine reading as a social-cultural phenomenon with its contemporary challenges and strategies. The conducted survey is significant and informative for detection of reading habits and interests of university students. The subject of the paper requires a prompt response from the education authorities to solve this crucial problem and revive reading culture again as a modern trend in public development.*

Key words: reading; reading habits; education; social-cultural phenomenon; university students

Problem statement. The issue of reading, or to be more exact «not reading», has attracted much attention of educationalists all over the world. It has become an alarming problem especially among young people both at schools and higher educational institutions. However, before presenting the results of our own analysis of this question, we would like to specify certain general notions concerning it. More than thirty years of pedagogical work starting at an ordinary village school and advancing to higher educational establishment makes me observe a continuous decline in reading habits of young people at different ages. The questions «What do you mean by reading?» or «What is reading for you?» have a mixed perception. For some individuals it is just the activity of somebody who reads, for others – the act of reading something, and still others consider it to be a kind of cognitive skill, a process of getting knowledge.

Here we consider reading not as a mechanical process of making words out of syllables and sentences out of words to uncover textual meaning. It means literacy. Attention is drawn to reading as a source of getting knowledge to help orient themselves in various spheres of life. In this sense a holistic approach in education and reading in particular described by John P. Miller is a relevant observation here. «Holistic education is concerned with connections in human experience – connections between mind and body, between linear thinking and intuitive ways of knowing, between academic disciplines, between individual and community, and between the personal self and the transpersonal Self that all spiritual traditions believe exist beyond the ego» [7, p. 158]. Such an approach emphasizes how the parts of

a whole relate to each other to form this whole. From the point of view of this perspective, reading relates to speaking, writing, listening comprehension, and culture in general. It is especially important considering the atomistic highly technological worldview of the modern age when the mission of humanistic values is to integrate spiritual and scientific perspectives.

Analysis of studies and publications on the issue. Making young people literate today is much easier than to make them educated [1, p. 7]. It is not a secret that the majority of youth even in developed countries of the world is satisfied with reading comic strips or advertisement. Professor V. S. Polikarpov in his publications emphasizes all the weakness of modern American system of education, which is the result of American civilization of business, with its own philosophy of pragmatism appreciating businesslike character, proficiency, focus on momentary concrete result, and material welfare as the leading features of American mentality. He defined a basic idea of American approach to life adjustment education, since 75% of senior pupils determined only three main subjects: native language, social sciences including USA history and civic studies, and physical training. Schools are free to choose from 100 to 150 courses most of which are of an applied character (family economy, driving, consumer's mathematics, nursing at home, cosmetics, canning, etc.). Even many American specialists call this system «a shopping center» or «cafeteria», where a customer takes his/her own choice. Therefore, only approximately 25% of American school-leavers receive valuable comprehensive education. Moreover, in recent decades, expenses on textbooks have

50% decreased [5]. No wonder that the level of reading leaves much to be desired. In his works A. V. Vorontsov defines reading as a social problem nowadays. The author exemplifies UNESCO statistical data. According to them 771 million of adults in the world cannot read, and about 100 million of children do not attend schools. According to the results of international studies PISA4 (Program for International Student Assessment) conducted in 2000 and involving 32 countries the interest to reading decreased considerably. Russia is 27 in the rankings. Comparative analysis demonstrates that 60% of students in developed countries possess satisfactory literacy, in Russia this number is 43%. Approximately 27% of pupils in Russia are assessed to be of unsatisfactory literacy, while in Finland this number is 7%, in Japan – 10%, in Korea – 6%. The researcher considers that the scale of this social problem is so much substantial that gives rise to speak about systemic crisis and critical neglect of reading and writing culture in the country. Due to this fact in 2006 the Federal Press and Mass Communication Agency and Russian Book Union elaborated «National Program on Maintenance and Development of Reading» [2, p.30]. Among other recommendations contained in the Program there is one to introduce into the curriculum of higher educational institutions the qualification and train specialists in the field of bibliology and culture of reading, since this subjects are stipulated only for the teachers of junior schools [6, p. 14]. In Ukraine the problem of reading has become especially acute. It is discussed from the point of view of book market research, monitoring of the situation, learning requirements of readers, and formation of reading culture. This issue is investigated on the bases of pedagogical, psychological and physiological contexts. Numerous social-statistical investigations in this field determine reading as a social-cultural phenomenon with its contemporary challenges and strategies. Thus, in 2013-2014 GfK Ukraine (established in 1934 as *Gesellschaft für Konsumforschung*, «Society for Consumer Research») within the framework of the project Book Platform conducted a substantial research «Reading in Ukraine. Results of the Investigations on Reading Habits and Attitude to Reading». The data were published and widely discussed, mostly from a negative side. The public was shocked by the fact that 42% of Ukrainians do not read. But in general, the situation in Ukraine is not a unique one, and it fits with the modern world trends. Moreover, reading today is presented in various forms – not only traditional books, but other sources of information [4, p. 87]. Still other researchers present the latest poll according to which 80% of Ukrainian population does not read books at all. And it is in the country which was one of the most reading one in the world! [3].

Of course, the culture of reading is very much interconnected with the way we are brought up and the environment in which we are growing. I remember «the old days», when every year our family subscribed to a number of periodicals to our different tastes, ages and requirements to

say nothing of constant stocking of the home library. We had many friends we could share our excitement with and joy of reading *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Three Men in a Boat*, stories about Sherlock or Poirot etc. Bed time story books were a routine of life. Our parents were regular in book reading as well. In those days book reading habit was termed «a culture». There were a lot of people of different ages seriously addicted to books, and an old saying that «the book is the best friend or present» was universally accepted. Here I may be blamed for nostalgic feelings, but I can now understand how much our reading habits have helped us to become accustomed with literature, sciences, language and speaking skills, and career promotion as well. «Today a reader, tomorrow a leader», – Margaret Fuller, an American women's rights activist, literary critic and writer said.

Unfortunately, in the last two decades we have been witnessing a constant decline in reading habits of Ukrainian youth, and it is still more discouraging as it refers to young people getting their higher education. The reasons for that are, first of all, great political and economic reforms taken place in the country dashing aside at the turn of the century. Along with some positive changes including the growth of democratic values, open borders, availability and attainment of European and world standards of living, we cannot but state the fact of easy penetration of some negative phenomena such as various kinds of addiction – drugs, computer games, provoking indifference to the surrounding world. Reading habits today are limited to being informed of the latest news while Internet surfing. Great Russian classical writer F. M. Dostoyevsky wrote that one could not consider himself to be educated in case he did not read a hundred of pages a day. So, are we educated today? Do we read a hundred of pages a day? From generation to generation people read less and less. While traveling anywhere or just going to work by public transport we can see less and less people holding a newspaper or magazine in their hands, they are sitting with their ears plugged up with headphones instead. And it is not only the growing use of Internet or television. It is the result of inadequate improper education and lack of reading culture in families, schools and universities.

The greatest benefit of reading, especially to the young, is that it helps them to cultivate creativity and imagination. Educationalists and researchers note that children who are avid readers have a higher IQ and score better marks which results in their personal development and future career prospects advance. And probably the only way of reversing this essential trend will require efforts of both parents and teachers to resume the habit of reading in children from a young age. In this sense such an invention of the high-tech age as various reading devices including tablets, e-books, iPads etc. are very much helpful. They are convenient to be used, because as soon as you finish reading one book, you can download the next. In this way the number of digital

readers is constantly growing due to accessibility. Reading devices become more popular among university graduates and those with their annual income higher than an average one. However, still there are many people who prefer turning physical pages to reading on screens because it is easier to focus and know where you are in a book. Some of them «like the way the book feels in the hands».

Objective of our study was to learn the problem of enhancing reading habits among university students.

Materials and methods. For this purpose we have conducted a survey among junior students of Higher State Educational Establishment of Ukraine «Bukovinian State Medical University» aged from 17 to 20. Special questionnaire was designed including the questions concerning reading tastes, frequency of reading, languages preferred, aim of reading, etc. The data obtained were statistically processed.

Results and discussion. According to the survey 87.9% of the students like to read (educational literature was not included), and only 12.06% don't. 75.28% of the respondents prefer printed books to e-books (16.09%), and Internet resources (8.62%). Reading tastes were distributed as follows: 54.59% answered that they prefer reading adventures, 35.6% – love stories, 27.58% – detective stories and novels, historical and scientific literature shared the same score – 24.7%. At the same time, only 15.5% of young people have given their preference to more than three kinds of literature which is indicative of the fact that the majority is not many-sided.

The survey asked some other questions:

– *Why do you read most often?* – to learn something new (28.7%), for pleasure (70.68%), to discuss with my friends or group-mates (2.29%), to get ready for classes (24.13%).

– *What language(s) do you prefer?* – Ukrainian (73.56%), Russian (13.2%), Ukrainian + Russian (9.19%), other languages including English (4.02%). There were only 10.9% of the respondents found to be bilingual.

– *Do you read regularly?* – yes (33.3%), no (66.6%).

– *What prevents you from regular reading?* – lack of time (95.97%), availability of high-quality literature (4.02%), it is not interesting for me (1.72%).

The results of the survey are not ambiguous. On the one hand, pedagogues may be satisfied as the majority of young people like reading with their tastes to adventure, love and detective literature stipulated by their age and interests. We cannot but admit with pleasure that more than 70% are found to be having leisure reading. More than a half of the respondents are motivated in their reading with more than 28% looking for something new and more than 24% studying for classes. Does not it mean they read only to pass in examinations? At the same time we cannot but see current system shortcomings: young people are isolated in their reading interests as only a miserable number of them (2.29%) exchange information and discuss what they have read. Love for reading (87.9%) does not mean its realization due to the lack of time (more than 95%). More than a quarter of

the respondents (25.28%) are not able to indicate the name of the book and its author they have read lately. The fact that 73.56% of young people prefer reading in their native language only is rather alarming. From one viewpoint, a negative attitude to the Russian language which traditionally was preferred in the region as the language of international communication can be explained by the recent events in Ukraine and general public opinion, but only 10.9% of young people able to read literature in two languages are the most shocking. Even at the times of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire from the end of XVII and beginning of the XX century the majority of Bukovinian inhabitants was able to speak several languages as it was dictated by the requirements of the time and preconditions for successful communication, existence and perception of the world they lived in. Nowadays with vast possibilities to travel, communicate and improve themselves young people appeared to suffer from information hunger as they are not able speak any other language but their own one. This problem issues the challenge of «unbroken soil» in Ukrainian system of education and a lot of practical work both for teachers and learners.

The survey appeared to be rather significant and informative as Bukovyna region and the town of Chernivtsi as its center has always been highly educated and cultured with several universities and colleges, some of them dated more than two hundred years. Moreover, the population is multinational, every community still preserving its national traditions, customs, religion, and habits. Moreover, many young people from several neighboring regions are Medical University students, and thus we can learn reading interests not only in one area. We have found it very interesting when read about today's youth's reading habits.

Resuming our small research, we can suggest several reasons influencing reading habits in youth. We cannot deny that in the era of technology and living in fast lane, the time to be spent on reading books is now being spent with various gadgets. But the main factor responsible for this decline is our educational system and teaching practices beginning from family and primary school level. Our school and university libraries today are required to have a good collection of literature accessible to students and change their working hours on holidays and days-off. Another reason is that book reading habits are replaced by online versions of books, which make all the new and trendy books easily available without waste of money and time. And unfortunately, high-quality books today are sold on shops with expensive prices, and a number of book buyers are decreasing day by day as compared to the past when bookshops and markets were full and busy with book lovers.

Conclusion. In general, decline in book reading culture is a bad phenomenon for the development of a civilized, educated, democratic, tolerant and plural society. It requires a prompt response by the concerned educational authorities to solve this crucial issue and revive reading culture again as

a modern trend in public development. Otherwise, the day may finally arrive, that Albert Einstein feared the mankind saying, «I fear the day technology will surpass our human interaction. The world will have a generation of idiots».

Prospects of further studies. In our further studies we would like to design a new questionnaire including questions/statements concerning world classical and modern literature, involve both Ukrainian and foreign students into the survey, and compare the results in order to promote improvement of reading culture as an essential constituent in training contemporary many-sided and educated specialists.

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Войткевич Ніна. До проблеми читацьких компетентностей та звичок серед студентської молоді.

А Проблеми читання є нагальними для освітян у всьому світі. Увага приділяється до читання як джерела отримання знань, що допомагає зорієнтувати себе у різних сферах життя. З точки зору холистичного підходу в освіті читання співвідноситься з мовленням, письмом, умінням слухати та культурою загалом. Культура читання тісно пов'язана з тим, як ми виховані та оточення, в якому ми зростаємо. Багато дослідників сьогодні визначають читання як соціально-культурне явище зі своїми сучасними викликами та стратегіями. Проведене дослідження виявляється досить важливим та інформативним у плані визначення читацьких звичок і смаків студентської молоді. Проблема, що порушується у статті, потребує негайних дій від відповідних освітніх кіл задля вирішення цього ключового завдання та відродження культури читання як сучасного тренду у розвитку суспільства.

Ключові слова: читання; читацькі звички; освіта; соціально-культурне явище; студентська молоддь

Войткевич Ніна. К проблеме читательских компетентностей и привычек среди студенческой молодёжи.

С Проблемы чтения являются безотлагательными для педагогов во всём мире. Внимание уделяется чтению как источнику приобретения знаний, помогающему ориентироваться в различных сферах жизни. С точки зрения холистического подхода в образовании чтение соотносится с говорением, письмом, умением слушать и культурой вообщем. Культура чтения тесно связана с тем, как мы воспитаны и в каком окружении произрастаем. Сегодня многие исследователи определяют чтение как социально-культурное явление с его собственными современными вызовами и стратегиями. Проведенное исследование представляется достаточно весомым и информативным в плане определения читательских привычек и вкусов студенческой молодёжи. Проблема, затронутая в статье, требует безотлагательных действий от определённых компетентных органов образования для решения этой ключевой задачи и возрождения культуры чтения как современного тренда в развитии общества.

Ключевые слова: чтение; читательские привычки; образование; социально-культурное явление; студенческая молодёжь