

THE ROLE OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN FORMING KEY AND SUBJECT-SPECIFIC COMPETENCIES IN STUDENTS

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Annotation. *This paper examines the didactic potential of children's literature – including fairy tales, stories, poems, and picture books – in forming key and subject-specific competencies among primary and secondary school students. Based on a systematic analysis of more than 160 empirical and theoretical sources, the study reveals the mechanisms through which literary texts contribute to the development of reading literacy, critical thinking, moral-character education, emotional intelligence and empathy, as well as intercultural competence. According to the OECD Learning Framework 2030, competencies are defined as the ability to mobilize "knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values" to meet complex demands in real-life situations [1]. Children's literature stands out as a unique pedagogical resource because it naturally integrates these four dimensions through the dynamic process of meaning-making between the reader and the text.*

Keywords: *children's literature, competency-based education, reading literacy, critical thinking, character education, empathy, intercultural competence, interdisciplinary integration.*

In recent decades, modern education has shifted from traditional knowledge transmission toward a competency-based approach. This approach emphasizes not only the acquisition of facts but the integrated application of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values in authentic, real-world contexts [1]. Children's literature serves as a powerful and multifunctional pedagogical tool. It acts not merely as a resource for language development, but also as a moral and emotional medium that supports the holistic development of the child. When students engage with high-quality literary texts, they go far beyond decoding words. They actively imagine, interpret, evaluate, empathize, and construct personal meaning from narrative structures, character actions, themes, and stylistic devices. This paper synthesizes theoretical and empirical evidence to demonstrate how engagement with children's literature effectively fosters essential competencies across six key areas.

Children's literature plays a foundational role in developing core literacy skills, including fluent and expressive reading, deep comprehension of main ideas and supporting details, and the ability to make intertextual and personal connections. Literary reception goes beyond mechanical reading; it becomes a fundamental tool for cultivating reading comprehension, critical thinking, aesthetic sensitivity, and cultural awareness.

Empirical studies confirm these benefits. For instance, after implementing literature-based instruction, 85% of students (25 out of 29) demonstrated significant improvement in correct intonation and pronunciation during expressive reading. At the same time, motivation remains

a serious challenge: surveys show that 47.24% of students read children's stories only occasionally, while 24.48% never read them at all [2]. These findings highlight the need for more engaging and systematic approaches to foster a sustainable reading culture.

Literature provides an ideal environment for developing critical thinking skills. It encourages students to ask probing questions, uncover implicit meanings, analyze the author's perspective, and relate the text to their own life experiences and cultural context. Through well-chosen stories, children explore alternative ways of responding to complex situations – such as acceptance, rebellion, withdrawal, or indifference – which helps them clarify their own values and decision-making processes.

Interactive group activities, including think-pair-share, literature circles, and structured text debates, further strengthen these skills by promoting multiple perspectives and respectful dialogue. In one study, 62% of students (18 out of 29) showed high levels of active participation in such discussions [2].

One of the most important contributions of children's literature lies in moral and character formation. Well-selected texts nurture essential personal qualities such as love for nature, family, and homeland; awareness of cultural roots; appreciation of beauty, kindness, and justice. By presenting relatable moral dilemmas and positive role models, literature serves as an effective medium for character education.

Teachers who integrate literature-based programs report notable improvements in students' reading fluency, text comprehension, and internalization of moral values. According to recent research, approximately 82% of students demonstrated measurable growth in moral reflection and ethical understanding after participating in structured literature activities [2].

Literature-based learning significantly enhances not only linguistic competence but also emotional intelligence and social sensitivity. Stories stimulate imagination, encourage prediction and interpretation of characters' feelings, and foster empathy by allowing readers to "step into the shoes" of others. Intervention studies have shown clear gains in emotional vocabulary, the ability to recognize explicit and masked emotions, and overall emotional maturity [3]. Furthermore, books often serve as a source of emotional stability, psychological support, and safe escapism, especially during challenging periods in a child's life.

Multicultural children's literature functions as both a mirror and a window (and sometimes a sliding glass door). As a mirror, it reflects children's own identities, experiences, and cultural backgrounds, promoting self-affirmation. As a window, it opens views into different cultures, traditions, and ways of life, broadening students' worldview [5]. At its best, such literature helps children understand that despite surface differences in language, customs, or appearance, all people share universal feelings, aspirations, and human dignity. In this way, children's books preserve not only national cultural identity but also the broader spirit of humanity.

To maximize the potential of children's literature, teachers should implement a structured system of pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading tasks. Effective tools include reading journals, literature circles, dialogic discussions, and modern digital platforms such as LearningApps, Wordwall, Kahoot!, and Quizizz. Reading journals, in particular, can be used

both within a single subject and across disciplines. They help students develop reflective thinking and transferable problem-solving skills that are applicable to real-life situations. Teachers play a crucial guiding role by asking open-ended questions that stimulate deeper analysis and personal response.

In conclusion, children's literature is a powerful, multifunctional pedagogical resource that simultaneously develops reading literacy, critical thinking, moral values, emotional intelligence, empathy, and intercultural awareness. When age-appropriate literary texts are thoughtfully integrated through scaffolded tasks, dialogic interaction, and multimodal activities, they become one of the most effective strategies in competency-based education. Systematic use of children's literature in primary and secondary schools can make a significant contribution to the holistic development of students, preparing them not only for academic success but also for responsible and empathetic participation in 21st-century society.

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