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Teaching higher order thinking skills in future teachers of foreign literature through individual reading

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Abstract. The article aims to analyze and compare the notions of individual and independent reading, to survey the studies on the effective teaching of higher order thinking skills and to substantiate the idea of promoting HOT skills through proper organization of the individual reading process in higher educational establishments of Ukraine. The findings can be used in the process of foreign literature teachers' training, as well as extrapolated to the organization of home reading, extra-curricular reading etc.

Keywords: *individual reading, independent reading, higher order thinking skills, future teachers of foreign literature*

Introduction. Present-day realities demonstrate the call for professionals capable of independent thinking and making informed decisions, possessing flexible and creative frame of mind in order to generate new ideas. This tendency can be illustrated by the regulatory documents of many countries regarding education, which have been declaring the importance of thinking skills (Quality Enhancement Plan for Reaffirmation of Accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, the National Educational Doctrine of Russian Federation, the State Standard Concept of General Education, the Concept of Russian Education Modernization for the period through to 2010, the State Standard of Basic and Complete General Secondary Education of Ukraine), ability to analyze and creativity as an educational target, stating that "preparing students to think critically and creatively is essential to a competitive workforce" [7, p. 10].

The ability to think effectively in order to cope with the challenges of the job is also – and even much more – true in regard to teachers in general and foreign literature teachers in particular, as their task, role, professional and moral duty is to teach other people think, which is only possible provided they are themselves successful "thinkers".

That means that the process of such teachers' training should involve techniques and technologies oriented towards the development of thinking skills which some scholars and researchers name "higher order thinking" (hereinafter HOT). Successful teaching and learning of such thinking skills is possible provided a number of conditions are observed, namely: active student's participation in the educational process, individually-oriented approach to teaching, interactive teaching techniques etc. Similar ideas are expressed in O. Bessert's monography: "modern society demands the orientation of psychological-pedagogical science and daily teaching practice towards the special educational technologies' creation, based on students' personality and individuality" [1, p. 4]. Thus, present-day education should be focused on teaching effective thinking, and at the same time use appropriate methods and techniques, which take into account individual peculiarities and involve active students' involvement in the process.

Having analyzed bachelors' training programs in higher educational establishments of Ukraine, we can conclude that the speciality of foreign literature teacher is often combined with the speciality of foreign language(s) teacher. This fact is true for at least 50 higher educational establishments of Ukraine. Thus, the educational program for such teachers has specific features, contributing to

both abovementioned specialties and making the training more multifaceted and comprehensive than it would have been in case of single-speciality education. In Ukraine future teachers of foreign literature have individual reading as a type of educational activity as a part of their curriculum. It is worth noting that individual reading is based on independent students' work and individual preferences; it not only meets all the requirements of successful teaching of thinking skills, but also develops the basis, foundation for such teaching and contributes to professional competence formation. Thus, we believe that individual reading, due to its peculiarities, has the potential to become one of the key devices helping to develop future teachers' thinking skills and critical habit of thinking.

Overview of publications. One should point out the keen interest of western researchers to reading as an aspect of language and literature study. Extensive studies in the sphere of such type of reading as independent reading were conducted by L. Anderson, P.T. Wilson, L.G. Fielding, W.B. Elley, F. Mangubhai, B.M. Taylor, B.J. Frye, G.M. Maruyama and many others. The essence and peculiarities of teaching HOT skills are studied in the works of L. Anderson, G. Brookhart, R. Collins, A.L. Costa, K. Cotton, P.A. Facione, D.R. Krathwohl, T.F. Fenimore and M.B. Tinzmann, R.J. Marzano, R.J. Sternberg, R.J. Swartz, R.W. Wegerif, D. Willis, M. Thomas.

Addressing to the more specific topic – the topic of individual reading in Ukraine – we have to agree with D. Matsko who points out "the lack of theoretical and methodological development in regard to individual reading organization process in educational establishments" [3]. The analysis of topic-in-question-related publications also shows that a number of aspects (but not the problem holistically) were given attention by scholars and researchers. For example, the problem of teaching reading in the process of foreign language teaching is covered in the works of G. Barabanova, I. Berdnykova, O. Bigych, N. Kucherenko, S. Nikolayeva, N. Selivanova, Zh. Tishchenko, O. Sherstyuk, I. Shulga, Ph. Prowse. More specifically, the works of O. Sherstyuk and N. Kucherenko deal with teaching reading in high school. The scientific research of O. Bigych, I. Berdnykova, G. Mal'kovsky covers the problem of home reading organization in secondary school and higher educational establishments [3]. These works will form the theoretical basis for our comparison of key aspects of such kinds of reading as independent reading abroad and individual reading in Ukraine and several other post-soviet countries.

The purpose of the article. Our objective is, on the one hand, to analyze the concepts of independent and

individual reading, to extrapolate foreign researchers' experience in the field of independent reading organization to foreign literature teachers' training in higher educational establishments of Ukraine, and, on the other hand, to view the above mentioned concepts in regard to and interdependence with HOT skills. In order to perform such analysis we shall consider the similarities and diversities of the abovementioned process organization in this country and abroad, compare the processes and role of independent and individual reading in both educational discourses, investigate the HOT structure and the mechanisms of HOT development via individual reading.

Main Body. To start with, we should differentiate between the terms to be used in our further research, i.e. the terms of "independent reading" and "individual reading". Independent reading is an extra-curricular type of activity, this term is characteristic of the USA and Western Europe. The organization of independent reading has been extensively studied in those countries, as it is considered to be an effective instrument to achieve success in studies. As for individual reading, it is a phenomenon, characteristic of Ukrainian teaching reality (and some other CIS countries), but it is present in a restricted number of training programs, namely those developed for foreign languages departments of higher educational establishments. This means that mainly future teachers of foreign language(s) and literature can use the benefits of individual reading in order to contribute to their competence formation. And now we shall dwell on the definitions of both reading types.

In the research literature independent reading is defined in a variety of ways and several terms are used in reference to this concept. In fact, ten different definitions appear to either be closely related to or are used synonymously with the independent reading construct. These terms include the following: (a) voluntary reading, (b) voluntary independent reading, (c) leisure reading, (d) spare-time reading, (e) sustained silent reading, (f) self-selected reading, (g) recreational reading, (h) reading outside of school, (i) independent silent reading, and (j) free voluntary reading [11, p. 7].

The essence of the construct is complex, so different definitions highlight its different aspects. For example, L. Donohue defines independent reading as "the driving force in a literary block that makes the other instructional components possible and provides opportunities for practice and reinforcement of skills learned" [6]. The definition of Bernice E. Cullinan is simpler, presenting independent reading as the reading which students choose to do on their own . . . [when] no one assigns it; no one requires a report; no one checks on comprehension [5]. P. Marshall views independent reading as "the end result of a well-executed balanced literacy program which allows students the chance to "practice" the strategies they've learned through guided reading, shared reading, and teacher read alouds – the other components of balanced literacy" [10].

So, independent reading is the kind of reading which students choose to do on their own. It is not assigned or assessed, but has a positive effect on learning achievement. The conducted overview of research on the effects of independent reading on learning achievement has

proved the correlation of success in learning and the amount of independent reading students do.

Speaking about the definition of "individual reading" as a phenomenon, characteristic of Ukrainian teaching reality, O. Bessert views it as "non-translated, communicative reading; "flexible" silent reading (fluent or slow); "mature" reading, for which the synthesis processes are typical" [2, p. 8]. In scientific literature we may also come across the following definition of individual reading: "It is such a kind of independent extracurricular reading when a student chooses the text for reading according to his/her own preferences" [4].

Despite the fact that the universally acceptable definition is yet to be found, researches unanimously agree that individual reading manifests its complex nature in a variety of ways: on the one hand, the individualization is realized through the teaching process organization (every student reads his/her individual text or literary work), and on the other hand, through teaching model orientation towards students' personality, usage of students' own reading teaching strategies. So, it is a type of activity that:

1. demands the existence of certain skills of getting information from the written text;
2. is a special (personality-oriented) approach to reading skills formation;
3. is as well a special mode of study (based on different teaching strategies) and
4. is a certain content of teaching and technology of teaching, containing the complex of training exercises and tasks, training and check methods [1, p. 5, 24].

In addition to these features, S. Mihaleva and O. Ushnikova stress the considerable axiological potential of individual reading which is realized due to the fact that the exposure to literary, publicistic, scientific or any other style always means the exposure to culture and traditions of the country the language of which is studied, with universal human, Christian, ethnic and individual personal values [4].

As we can see, the essence of the concept "individual reading" is not exclusively limited to individual work, as it does not make up the most significant part of the individual reading process. The key point of individual reading in the context of future teachers of foreign literature training is that this kind of reading is being oriented towards the work of each individual person with regard to his/her peculiarities of character, aesthetic preferences and psychological propensities.

Thus we may conclude that the concepts of independent and individual reading are not entirely identical in sense bearing, though we may find conceptual connection between them as they both pursue the same target goals though achieved via various methods and ways. The global similarities between these two kinds of work lie in the fact that the student is free to independently choose the book, author, topic, time, place etc. for his/her independent/individual reading. Both kinds of reading broaden the students' outlook, enrich knowledge and promote new skills formation. The key difference about both kinds is that independent reading is voluntary and is not assessed, while individual reading is an integral part of training programs for foreign literature teachers, as it helps to develop foreign language and literature competence and contributes to HOT skills formation, the latter

being of primary importance for any qualified professional. Comparing the concepts of "independent reading" and "individual reading" one more conclusion can be drawn, i.e. if independent reading as free-time occupation and the source of information has partially yielded its position to global computer technologies, the individual reading as integral part of teaching foreign language skills and forming the language competence is still relevant and essential and its value in educational process can hardly be overestimated.

In this paper teaching HOT skills and individual reading are viewed as two related processes, the latter being presented as the instrument for developing the former one. Thus our research will be further focused on HOT, as well as on the interdependence of developing thinking skills and reading process.

Before analyzing the notion of HOT in detail we should differentiate between HOT and critical thinking, as there are numerous related studies. It is worth mentioning that some researchers do not see the difference between these two notions, considering them to be synonymous. We partially agree with this approach as these two notions indeed have much in common though, in our opinion, HOT is a more general and universal term, uniting several types of thinking (critical among them).

Addressing to the term "HOT skills", it should be admitted that various definitions of it were provided by several specialists, working in this sphere. Thus, S.A. McDade defines it as "...the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication as a rubric to belief and action". In D.S. McDavitt's opinion, "higher order skills include analysis, synthesis, and evaluation and require mastery of previous levels, such as applying routine rules to familiar or novel problems". B. Bloom defined HOT skills simply as analysis, synthesis and evaluation, while in T.M. Haladyna's interpretation they are described as understanding of facts, concepts, principles, and procedures. Researchers underline that HOT skills involve the transformation of information and ideas. This transformation occurs when students analyze, combine facts and ideas and synthesize, generalize, explain, or arrive of some conclusion or interpretation. According to A.M. Tomei, manipulating information and ideas through these processes allows students to solve problems, gain understanding and discover new meaning [13].

In other sources we may come across the fact that HOT is called "critical" or "strategic" thinking, it can be described as the ability to use information to solve problems, analyze arguments, negotiate issues or make predictions. It involves examining assumptions and values, evaluating evidence, and assessing conclusions. In the context of the above mentioned, HOT skills are intellectual processes where students have to activate their minds in order to understand the hidden meaning from the information introduced to them, realize the relations among ideas, draw principles and rules, analyze and classify, generate and combine new ideas, evaluate and judge [13].

From all has been said it follows that HOT skills include critical, logical, reflective, metacognitive, and creative thinking. They are activated when individuals en-

counter unfamiliar problems, uncertainties, questions or dilemmas. Successful applications of such skills result in explanations, decisions, performances and products that are valid within the context of available knowledge and experience, and that promote continued growth in these and other intellectual skills. HOT skills are grounded in lower order skills such as discriminations, simple application and analysis, and cognitive strategies and are linked to prior knowledge of subject matter content. Appropriate teaching strategies and learning environments facilitate their growth as do student persistence, self-monitoring, and open-minded, flexible attitudes [8, p. 1]. In regard to the above said rationale we consider it expedient to treat the process of individual reading organization as an instrument for HOT skills development in the future foreign literature teachers.

This information will look more structured provided it is presented in a form of classification.

And it is Bloom's Taxonomy that was first to offer such structuring. Created in 1956 under the leadership of educational psychologist Dr. B. Bloom, it aimed to promote higher forms of thinking in education, such as analyzing and evaluating concepts, processes, procedures, and principles, rather than just facts remembering. Bloom's Taxonomy provided carefully developed definitions for each of the six major categories in the cognitive domain, which categories were ordered from simple to complex and from concrete to abstract, representing a cumulative hierarchy; that is, mastery of each simpler category was prerequisite to mastery of the next more complex one. In 2000-01 one of the original authors, D. Krathwohl, and a student of Bloom's, L. Anderson, spearheaded an effort to revise the original cognitive taxonomy, which resulted in two-dimensional framework: Knowledge and Cognitive Processes. The key difference between these two taxonomies lies in the fact, that in the original Taxonomy, the Knowledge category embodied both noun and verb aspects. This anomaly was eliminated in the revised Taxonomy by allowing these two aspects, the noun and verb, to form separate dimensions, the noun providing the basis for the Knowledge dimension and the verb forming the basis for the Cognitive Process dimension [9, p. 213]. However, the introduced modifications do not change the core of the Bloom's cognitive levels. All evolve around the same cognitive thinking skills.

Speaking about establishing the connection between Bloom's taxonomy and reading skills, we should point out the direct dependence of the text complexity upon the level of thinking in Bloom's hierarchy that is used for this text interpretation. When students are faced with increasingly challenging books they fluctuate between levels of text understanding. Instead of seeing reading as a linear progression according to Bloom's taxonomy, students tend to jump between various levels of thinking, depending on their understanding of this text. And here the teacher's task is to provide opportunities for students to practice higher levels of thinking, i.e. the difficulty of text should correspond to their reading skills' and vocabulary level. In case the text is too complex for a student, he/she goes down to lower thinking levels in its perception. Researchers claim that by means of providing regular opportunities for students to practice various levels of thinking, they will find ways of adapting them to a greater variety

of texts [6, p. 55-56]. In other words, students must understand the text well enough in order to apply higher order thinking skills to its interpretation.

The dependence of thinking upon reading was also covered in the works of R. Paul, who pointed to a necessary connection between critical thinking and skilled reading, stating that the reflective mind improves its thinking by reflectively thinking about it. In reading, the reflective mind monitors how it is reading while it is reading. The foundation for this ability is knowledge of how the mind functions when reading well. Learning how to read closely is a complex critical thinking ability: when one can read closely, he/she can take ownership of important ideas in a text [12].

Consequently, we agree that HOT skills include the abilities to analyze, synthesize and evaluate and such structure is based on cognitive skills of Bloom's taxonomy. Applying these skills to the reading process, we can state that analysis in terms of reading requires students to categorize text-related information, guess meaning of word through context, recognize causes and effects, infer the author's attitudes, and/or compare between items related to a certain text. Synthesis, when applied to reading process, requires students to summarize texts, retell the material using their own words, generate information related to the text, and/or predict events or solutions related to the text. In regard of evaluation, students are to express

their opinions toward situations in texts, conclude themes of texts, and/or recognize subjectivity or objectivity [13].

We are currently working on methodological recommendations on the individual reading organization, which will include practical tasks. At the moment this pilot project is at the development stage. The materials and studies, analyzed within the scope of our present research will find application in the process of individual reading organization for future foreign literature teachers at the Institute of foreign languages of Cherkasy Bohdan Khmelnytskyi National University.

Conclusion. Our research has proved that reading as educational activity, namely such kinds of reading as independent (abroad) and individual (Ukraine) reading possess a huge potential in HOT skills development due to their ability to make the readers think about the text they read, the abundance of information, broadening the students' outlook due to the exposure to the authentic texts, and the power to evoke the interest to studies and world perceiving. The causal effect can be represented as: the amount of reading → the level of thinking skills → language and literature competence formation. Thus, in our opinion, individual reading should be organized with the focus on HOT skills in higher educational establishments, as these skills are the cornerstone of future professional success of a specialist and, in global terms, the whole society, as personal success is the contribution to prosperity and image of the country itself.

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Афанасьева О.С. Обучение будущих учителей зарубежной литературы навыкам мышления высшего порядка посредством индивидуального чтения

Аннотация. Статья предоставляет анализ и сравнение понятий индивидуального и самостоятельного чтения, обзор исследований эффективного обучения навыкам мышления высшего порядка, а также обосновывает предположение о развитии навыков мышления высшего порядка посредством правильной организации процесса индивидуального чтения в высших учебных заведениях Украины. Результаты исследования могут быть использованы как в процессе обучения будущих учителей зарубежной литературы, так и при организации домашнего, внеклассного чтения, т.п.

Ключевые слова: индивидуальное чтение, самостоятельное чтение, навыки мышления высшего порядка, будущие учителя зарубежной литературы