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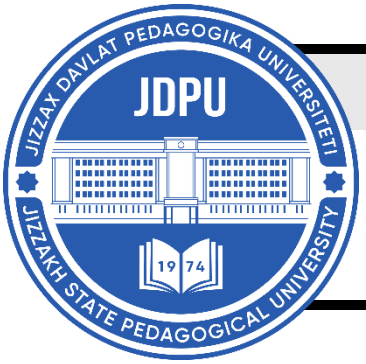

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PRINCIPLES OF LEXICAL SELECTION IN CHILDREN'S LITERARY TEXTS AND THEIR IMPACT ON LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: The written works and illustrations produced for children are aimed at educating or entertaining youngsters. The article looks at an important part of children's literature. Adults cannot read children's literature as children do or as children themselves Children's literature covers the age range of infancy through early adolescence.

Introduction. Children's literature includes any written material that attracts and engages young readers. More specifically, it refers to books and magazines created for children who are not yet interested in adult literature or who lack the developmental and reading skills required to understand it. This category encompasses works intended for audiences from infancy through early adolescence, generally up to around twelve to fourteen years of age. Literature written for young adults occupies a space between children's and adult literature, often addressing more complex themes and employing more advanced literary techniques than those found in children's books.

Adults cannot experience children's literature in the same way children do, as suggested by Paton Walsh's definition, because these texts are intentionally constructed for a child audience. Although this distinction is widely acknowledged, relatively little research has

examined how adult readers respond differently to children's literature or how these differences influence their evaluations of the books. Aside from the use of the pronoun "you," there is little to dispute in this interpretation of children's texts. When the implied "you" refers to an adult reader, what lies within the bubble is certainly not invisible [2].

Reading level frameworks are fundamental to effective literacy instruction because they align learners with texts appropriate to their linguistic abilities and cognitive development. While English benefits from established systems such as Lexile measures, CEFR-aligned graded readers, and book banding models, Uzbek does not yet have a reading scale grounded in systematic linguistic analysis. As an agglutinative Turkic language, Uzbek is characterized by extensive derivational morphology, flexible word order, and suffix stacking. These structural features strongly influence text complexity and must therefore be considered when developing a reading scale. This study proposes a five-level Uzbek reading framework that reflects both linguistic properties and pedagogical needs.

Theoretical Background

Reading scales typically rely on measurable linguistic variables, including word frequency, sentence length, grammatical complexity, and levels of semantic abstraction. Research in language acquisition demonstrates that gradual exposure to increasingly complex linguistic structures enhances comprehension and memory, particularly among early readers.

Uzbek-Specific Challenges. Unlike isolating languages, Uzbek expresses grammatical relationships primarily through suffixation. A single word may encode tense, person, possession, and case, increasing the cognitive demands placed on readers. Consequently, both sentence length and morphological density significantly affect reading difficulty in Uzbek texts.

Methodology.

The proposed reading scale is informed by: A review of Uzbek primary school textbooks, An analysis of Uzbek children's literature, A comparison with established English reading-level frameworks. In addition, the framework incorporates linguistic criteria specific to agglutinative morphology. Texts are categorized into five levels based on the following dimensions: Vocabulary frequency and concreteness, Morphological complexity, Sentence structure, Degree of semantic abstraction, Narrative organization [6].

The Five-Level Uzbek Reading Scale. Level 1: Emergent Reader. Target group: Ages 5–6. Linguistic features: Very short, single-clause sentences. Frequent use of high-frequency concrete nouns. Minimal use of suffixes. Verbs primarily in the present tense. Examples: Bu bola. Ona keldi. Texts at this level rely heavily on repetition, visual support, and predictable patterns. Vocabulary reflects the child's immediate environment. Level 2: Early Reader. Target

group: Ages 6–7. Linguistic features: Introduction of common verbs and basic adjectives, Use of simple conjunctions (va, lekin), Use of plural and possessive suffixes. Examples: Bola o‘ynaydi va kuladi. Mening do‘stim bor. Narratives remain clear and linear, focusing on everyday routines and familiar experiences to support developing reading fluency. Level 3: Developing Reader. Target group: Ages 8–9. Linguistic features: Increased suffix stacking, Introduction of case markers and varied verb tenses, Use of simple subordinate clauses. At this stage, texts begin to include limited abstract vocabulary and more explicit expressions of cause, emotion, and motivation.

Level 1: Emergent Reader. Target learners: Beginning readers (ages 5–6). Pedagogical focus: This level supports the initial development of print awareness and word recognition. Key linguistic features: Very short sentences containing only one idea, Frequent repetition of familiar, concrete nouns, Minimal use of grammatical endings, Verbs primarily in the present tense. Sample sentences: Bu bola. Ona keldi.

Texts at this stage rely on predictable structures, repetition, and visual support such as pictures. Vocabulary reflects the learner’s immediate environment (family, home, basic objects), enabling children to decode meaning with minimal cognitive load. Level 2: Early Reader. Target learners: Ages 6–7. Pedagogical focus: This level strengthens sentence comprehension and introduces basic grammatical relationships. Key linguistic features: Expanded use of common action verbs and simple adjectives, Introduction of basic conjunctions (va, lekin), Use of plural forms and possessive suffixes. Sample sentences: Bola o‘ynaydi va kuladi. Mening do‘stim bor.

Texts remain linear and concrete, emphasizing everyday routines and familiar experiences. Learners begin to understand how ideas connect within and across sentences. Level 3: Developing Reader. Target learners: Ages 8–9. Pedagogical focus: This level develops grammatical awareness and supports the transition from sentence-level reading to connected text comprehension. Key linguistic features: Increased use of multiple suffixes within a word, Introduction of case markers and varied verb tenses, Use of simple subordinate clauses to express cause, time, or preference. Sample sentences: Bola yomg‘ir yog‘gani uchun uyda qoldi. U kitob o‘qishni yaxshi ko‘radi [7].

According to Paton Walsh’s definition, adults are unable to engage with children’s literature in the same manner as children because such texts are deliberately designed for a young audience. While this difference is generally recognized, there has been limited research into how adults’ responses to children’s literature differ from those of children and how these responses shape adults’ judgments of the works. Apart from the use of the pronoun “you,” this

perspective on children's literature leaves little room for criticism. When the implied "you" is understood to be an adult, what exists within the bubble is clearly visible rather than hidden [2].

At this stage, learners encounter basic abstract vocabulary related to emotions and values. Characters' motivations and reasons for actions become more explicit, supporting inferential comprehension. Level 4: Fluent Reader. Target learners: Ages 10–12. Pedagogical focus: This level promotes reading fluency, interpretive skills, and sensitivity to stylistic language. Key linguistic features: Longer sentences with multiple clauses, Use of participles and converbs to link actions, Introduction of figurative and idiomatic expressions. Sample sentences: U kelayotgan odamni ko'rib, yuragi tez ura boshladi. Hayot daryo kabi oqib borardi.

Texts introduce symbolic meaning, richer description, and less strictly linear narration. Learners are encouraged to interpret implied meanings and analyze language choices. Level 5: Advanced Reader. Target learners: Adolescents and advanced readers (13+). Pedagogical focus: This level supports critical reading, abstract thinking, and literary analysis. Key linguistic features: Complex sentence structures with embedded clauses, Dense use of abstract and conceptual vocabulary, Stylistic variation and rhetorical devices. Sample sentence: Uning hayoti, taqdirning o'zi kabi, murakkab va sirli edi.

Texts emphasize psychological depth, philosophical reflection, and sophisticated narrative techniques, preparing learners for academic and literary reading.

Comparative Progression Across Levels

This progression illustrates a gradual increase in linguistic and cognitive demands aligned with learners' developmental stages.

Educational Applications. The proposed reading scale can support: Curriculum planning and sequencing, Development of graded Uzbek reading materials, Textbook evaluation and adaptation, Classroom-based reading assessment, Teacher training and professional development, Creation of digital readability tools for Uzbek language learning. Limitations and Future Directions. As a conceptual framework, this scale requires validation through classroom-based research and empirical studies, including: Corpus-based analysis of children's texts, Reading comprehension assessments across age groups, Alignment with national curriculum standards, Adaptation for dialectal variation and script differences

Future research may also connect this framework to CEFR descriptors and automated readability assessment systems.

Results and Discussions

Language develops gradually for children, progressing step by step, whereas adults are often able to understand meaning even when engaging with content from the middle. In today's context, it is often observed that infants demonstrate a remarkable capacity for thinking and learning, sometimes surpassing that of adults. Children build a strong foundation that allows them to develop and express their skills effectively. Learning is not restricted by age; adults, like children, remain learners throughout their lives. Therefore, both groups exist on the same platform of continuous learning.

A child's sound and language development within the home environment is a crucial factor that deserves careful attention. Appropriate sound levels and auditory exposure are important for young children, as strong listening skills help reduce distractions and enhance concentration. While language acquisition is essential for both adults and children, it serves as a fundamental need that supports communication and family life. At the same time, effective communication requires adherence to appropriate linguistic patterns.

Despite the rapid growth of digital media, many individuals still prefer reading physical books rather than engaging with online texts. Although digital platforms have nearly replaced traditional modes of learning, some readers believe that physical reading promotes better understanding and yields more positive learning outcomes. Digital media also presents certain disadvantages, such as reduced imagination and lower concentration levels in children, even among those who are well educated.

Both adults and children should choose a safe and comfortable environment that supports effective learning. While society continues to adapt to technological advancements and increasingly relies on digital platforms, safety and meaningful communication remain essential. Greater emphasis on conversation and interpersonal communication, along with reduced dependence on digital media, can bring positive changes to society. Ultimately, language and literature offer significant benefits to both children and adults. As language becomes more accessible, authors are better positioned to publish Indian literary texts that positively influence society. One of the key findings is that the orientation of literary language plays a beneficial role in shaping individuals within the community.

Tips for maintaining consistency in children's and adult literature. To avoid writing a novel that awkwardly falls between adult and children's fiction, writers should follow certain guidelines. First, focus on a specific target audience rather than attempting to appeal to everyone. Write authentically, staying true to the story and characters instead of making compromises for broader appeal. Second, maintain a consistent narrative voice so readers are never uncertain about the genre of the novel.

When writing for children, adopt the perspective of that age group rather than writing from an adult's retrospective viewpoint. Writers should reconnect with the mindset they had during childhood. Conversely, when writing for adults, maintain an adult perspective throughout the narrative, even when incorporating childhood flashbacks. In novels that shift between timelines, flashbacks should clearly connect to present-day storylines and be supported by narrative reasons for their placement.

Writers must carefully balance sensitivity and sophistication when crafting a children's novel. It is acceptable for young characters to confront serious issues or experience challenges typically associated with adulthood; however, these characters should not be portrayed with an unrealistic level of wisdom or maturity. The narrative voice should remain appropriate to the characters' age and perspective. This is a complex topic, as it is difficult to generalize across genres and individual works, and interpretations may differ. Nevertheless, these considerations offer useful guidance for determining the intended audience of a novel and ensuring that it is aligned with that purpose [8].

The maturity of children's literature is further reflected in the extensive body of commentary, academic research, criticism, historical writing, biography, and bibliography devoted to the field, particularly in countries such as Germany, Italy, Sweden, Japan, and the United States. Additionally, early forms of aesthetic theory and philosophies of literary composition contribute to its scholarly depth. Another significant indicator of its development is its capacity to establish independent institutions, including publishing houses, theaters, libraries, traveling storytellers, critics, periodicals, university lectures, professional associations, conferences, book festivals, exhibitions, and literary awards. Some critics argue, however, that the growing global institutionalization of children's literature may have diminished the genre's original spontaneity and innocence.

Adults may sometimes believe that they are reading children's books in the same way children do, but this is a misconception. As Paton Walsh's description implies, adults cannot engage with children's literature from a child's perspective, just as they cannot become children themselves. Adult responses to children's literature differ significantly from those of young readers, yet limited attention has been given to how these differences shape adults' interpretations and evaluations of such texts. There is also a widespread belief that printed books are becoming obsolete, much like vinyl records or 8-track tapes, in an increasingly digital world. Even in academic settings, such as universities where children's literature is taught, students report infrequent visits to libraries and rely heavily on online resources. Many people

assume that children's books are outdated, believing that contemporary children and adolescents no longer read printed material [4].

However, data from the publishing industry challenges this assumption. While e-books have grown in popularity, they account for only about 25 percent of the market and have largely stabilized at that level. Popular titles, such as Jeff Kinney's Diary of a Wimpy Kid series, report that approximately 95 percent of their sales are in print format. Research from the Pew Research Center further indicates that teens who own e-books also tend to own physical copies, which they reread and revisit. About 67 percent of children read for pleasure, and only 18 percent of teenagers prefer e-books to printed books. Although digital media offer greater accessibility and choice, print and digital formats function more as complements than competitors, each providing distinct reading experiences [4].

The success of the Harry Potter series marked a turning point in how publishers viewed teen literature, revealing it as a substantial and viable market. Before this shift, teenagers were often considered a marginal audience, largely because high school curricula prioritized adult classics rather than literature written specifically for teens. Growing demand from young readers demonstrated the existence of a strong market, leading to rapid expansion in the field of young adult literature.

The popularity of YA literature continued to rise with the emergence of new authors and the adaptation of popular works, such as The Hunger Games, into films. Readership expanded beyond teenagers to include adults, who now make up approximately 55 percent of the YA audience. The appeal of YA literature lies in its compelling storytelling and strong writing, as well as its formal innovations, including multiple narrators, verse novels, and extended series. Social media has also played a role in shaping the genre by allowing authors to connect directly with readers [5].

Recently, publishers have shifted their attention toward teen and middle-grade fiction, with many YA authors writing for readers aged eight to twelve—an age group increasingly recognized as underserved. This market is largely dominated by series fiction, though progress has been uneven, particularly in areas of cultural diversity and publisher commitment to inclusive representation. These trends highlight the need to critically assess market-driven publishing decisions.

Rather than merely following trends, educators, publishers, and readers should actively support books that have a meaningful impact on children. By evaluating popular fads and thoughtfully selecting texts to emphasize in classrooms and discussions, stakeholders can help shape a more thoughtful literary landscape.

At the same time, the availability of picture books has declined. Some critics argue that the picture book format is under threat, as publishers have reduced output by 10 to 15 percent and bookstores have allocated less shelf space due to declining sales, according to reports from The New York Times. One contributing factor is the belief among parents that children should move quickly to text-heavy chapter books to gain an academic advantage, which has further affected picture book sales [4].

Conclusion. A structured five-level reading framework provides a practical foundation for systematic literacy development in Uzbek. By aligning linguistic complexity with learners' cognitive and educational needs, this model offers clear guidance for educators, material developers, and researchers. It supports the creation of consistent, age-appropriate reading materials and advances evidence-based Uzbek language instruction.

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