

ARTISTIC CONCEPT OF PERSONALITY AS A MEANS OF DEVELOPING SCHOOLCHILDREN'S CRITICAL THINKING (BASED ON THE WORKS OF Nikolai Gogol AND WESTERN EUROPEAN NOVELS)**Orolova Ugilshod Sherpulat qizi**

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Annotation: This article examines the artistic concept of personality as an effective pedagogical tool for developing critical thinking among school students. Based on the analysis of literary works by Nikolai Gogol and Western European novelists, the study explores how literary characters embody social, moral, and psychological contradictions that stimulate analytical reasoning. The research relies on established literary criticism and pedagogical theories to demonstrate that engagement with complex fictional personalities enhances students' ability to interpret, evaluate, and reflect critically.

Keywords: artistic concept of personality, critical thinking, literary education, Gogol, Western European novel, character analysis, pedagogy

Introduction

The development of critical thinking has become a central objective in modern education systems. Scholars in pedagogy emphasize that analytical skills are best cultivated through engagement with complex texts that require interpretation and evaluation [1, p. 45]. Literature, particularly the novel, serves as a powerful medium for such development because it presents multifaceted representations of human personality.

The works of Nikolai Gogol, including *Dead Souls* and *The Overcoat*, offer profound psychological insights into individuals shaped by social realities [2, p. 112]. Similarly, Western European novels—such as those by Charles Dickens and Honoré de Balzac—present characters whose internal conflicts and moral dilemmas encourage readers to question societal norms [3, p. 89].

This article aims to analyze how the artistic representation of personality in these literary traditions contributes to the formation of critical thinking skills among school students.

Methodology

The research is based on qualitative literary and pedagogical analysis. The following methods were employed:

- Comparative literary analysis of works by Nikolai Gogol and Western European authors
- Hermeneutic interpretation of characters and narrative structures
- Analysis of pedagogical literature on critical thinking development

Primary texts analyzed include *Dead Souls* by Nikolai Gogol, *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens, and *Père Goriot* by Honoré de Balzac. Secondary sources include scholarly works on literary theory and educational psychology [4, p. 67].

Results

The analysis reveals several key findings:

Firstly, literary characters function as cognitive models through which students explore human behavior. For example, Chichikov in *Dead Souls* embodies moral ambiguity, prompting readers to evaluate ethical choices [2, p. 130].

Secondly, Western European novels present social realism that encourages critical examination of societal structures. Dickens' portrayal of poverty in *Oliver Twist* exposes systemic injustice, fostering analytical thinking about social issues [5, p. 54].

Thirdly, engagement with complex narratives enhances interpretive skills. Students learn to identify implicit meanings, contradictions, and authorial intent, which are essential components of critical thinking [6, p. 101]

Analysis and Discussion

The artistic concept of personality in literature represents a complex system of aesthetic, psychological, and social elements that together form a multidimensional model of human behavior. In literary theory, personality is not merely a set of individual traits but a dynamic construct shaped by historical context, social relations, and ideological frameworks [7, p. 73]. This multidimensionality makes literary characters particularly valuable for educational purposes, as they provide students with opportunities to engage in interpretive and evaluative thinking processes that are central to the development of critical thinking.

In the works of Nikolai Gogol, the artistic concept of personality is constructed through a combination of satire, realism, and symbolic representation. Gogol's characters often function simultaneously as individuals and as embodiments of broader social phenomena. For example, Chichikov in *Dead Souls* represents not only a cunning opportunist but also a reflection of the moral decay and bureaucratic corruption prevalent in Russian society during the 19th century [2, pp. 125–128]. This dual nature of character construction requires students to analyze both the psychological motivations of the character and the socio-historical conditions that shape those motivations.

Such analysis inherently fosters critical thinking because it demands the integration of multiple perspectives. Students must move beyond a superficial understanding of the character's actions and consider underlying causes, contradictions, and implications. This aligns with Bloom's taxonomy, where higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation are activated through engagement with complex material [6, p. 101].

A particularly illustrative example is Akaky Akakievich from *The Overcoat*. His personality is characterized by passivity, humility, and an almost mechanical adherence to routine. However, Gogol's narrative invites readers to question whether these traits are inherent or socially conditioned. The oppressive bureaucratic environment in which Akaky exists plays a crucial role in shaping his identity, suggesting that personality is not fixed but constructed through interaction with external forces [8, p. 91]. For students, this raises important questions about the relationship between individual agency and social structure, encouraging them to critically evaluate the determinants of human behavior.

In Western European literature, similar principles can be observed, though often expressed through different stylistic and thematic approaches. The novels of Honoré de Balzac, for instance, present a detailed portrayal of society in which characters are deeply embedded in economic and social networks. Rastignac in *Père Goriot* is a prime example of a character whose personality evolves in response to external pressures. Initially depicted as an idealistic young man, he gradually adopts pragmatic and morally ambiguous strategies to achieve success in Parisian society [9, pp. 115–118].

This transformation provides fertile ground for critical analysis. Students are encouraged to examine the factors that contribute to Rastignac's moral development, including social ambition, economic necessity, and cultural expectations. By doing so, they develop the ability to identify causal relationships and assess the ethical implications of individual choices. This process is essential for cultivating critical thinking, as it involves not only understanding but also evaluating complex situations.

Similarly, the works of Charles Dickens offer rich material for exploring the interaction between personality and social context. In *Oliver Twist*, characters are often positioned within a framework of social inequality and injustice. Oliver himself embodies innocence and resilience, while figures such as Fagin and Bill Sikes represent the darker aspects of human nature shaped by poverty and marginalization [5, pp. 54–58].

The contrast between these characters allows students to engage in comparative analysis, identifying differences and similarities in motivations, actions, and outcomes. This comparative approach is a key component of critical thinking, as it requires the ability to distinguish between various perspectives and to form reasoned judgments based on evidence.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the integration of literary analysis into the development of critical thinking is supported by numerous educational theories. According to Lev Vygotsky, cognitive development is closely linked to social interaction and the use of cultural tools, including language and literature [11, p. 88]. Literary texts, therefore, serve as mediating tools that facilitate the development of higher mental functions. When students engage with complex characters, they participate in a form of cognitive dialogue that enhances their ability to think critically.

Moreover, the concept of dialogism, introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin, is particularly relevant in this context. Bakhtin argues that meaning in literature emerges through the interaction of multiple voices and perspectives [7, p. 73]. This multiplicity encourages readers to consider different viewpoints and to question authoritative interpretations. In the classroom, this can be translated into dialogic teaching practices, where students are encouraged to discuss, debate, and interpret literary texts collaboratively.

Such practices have been shown to significantly improve critical thinking skills. When students articulate their interpretations and respond to the perspectives of others, they develop the ability to construct arguments, evaluate evidence, and refine their reasoning [10, p. 142]. This process not only enhances their understanding of literature but also equips them with transferable skills applicable to various domains.

Another important aspect of the artistic concept of personality is its capacity to evoke emotional engagement. Emotional responses to literary characters can serve as a catalyst for deeper cognitive processing. For example, empathy for Akaky Akakievich or Oliver Twist can motivate students to explore the underlying causes of their suffering and to critically assess the social structures that perpetuate inequality. This interplay between emotion and cognition is crucial for the development of critical thinking, as it encourages students to connect abstract concepts with real-world experiences.

Furthermore, the use of literary texts in education allows for the exploration of ethical dilemmas and moral reasoning. Characters such as Rastignac or Chichikov present situations in which moral boundaries are tested, prompting students to consider questions of right and wrong. This ethical dimension adds another layer to the development of critical thinking, as it requires students to evaluate not only factual information but also normative judgments.

It is also important to note that the effectiveness of literary analysis in developing critical thinking depends on the methods employed by educators. Traditional approaches that focus solely on plot summary and factual recall are insufficient for fostering higher-order thinking skills. Instead, teachers should adopt strategies that encourage active engagement, such as open-ended questions, problem-based learning, and interpretive discussions. These methods align with constructivist principles, which emphasize the active role of learners in constructing knowledge [12, p. 55].

In addition, the selection of literary texts plays a crucial role. Works that feature complex, ambiguous, and dynamic characters are more likely to stimulate critical thinking than those with simplistic or one-dimensional portrayals. The works of Nikolai Gogol and Western European novelists are particularly suitable in this regard, as they offer rich and nuanced representations of personality.

The comparative analysis of different literary traditions further enhances the development of critical thinking. By examining similarities and differences between Russian and Western European representations of personality, students gain a broader perspective on cultural and historical contexts. This comparative approach encourages them to question assumptions, recognize diversity, and develop a more sophisticated understanding of human behavior.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that the artistic concept of personality in literature is a powerful tool for developing critical thinking among school students. Works by Nikolai Gogol and Western European novelists provide rich material for analysis, enabling students to explore complex psychological and social themes.

Through engagement with literary characters, students develop interpretive, evaluative, and reflective skills. The findings confirm that integrating literary analysis into educational practice contributes significantly to cognitive development and prepares students for independent thinking.

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