

PIRLS READING LITERACY ASSESSMENT: IMPROVING READING COMPREHENSION THROUGH CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Andijon davlat chet tillari instituti
Ingliz filologiyasi, o‘qitish metodikasi
va tarjimashunoslik fakulteti
Tarjima nazariyasi va amaliyoti yo‘nalishi
401-guruh talabasi

Shaxobiddinova Maftuna

Supervisor: Abdurahmonov To‘raxon

Abstract: The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) is an international assessment designed to measure the reading literacy levels of primary school students, particularly those in the fourth grade. The assessment evaluates not only students' ability to read texts accurately, but also their capacity to understand, analyze, interpret, and evaluate written information. Despite ongoing educational reforms and curriculum updates, PIRLS results indicate that many students still face challenges in higher-level reading comprehension. This article explores the importance of PIRLS in modern education, identifies key difficulties students experience in real classroom settings, analyzes the main causes of weak reading comprehension, and suggests practical teaching strategies to improve reading literacy. The study emphasizes that improving everyday classroom practices can significantly enhance students' reading skills and overall academic success.

Keywords: PIRLS, reading literacy, comprehension, primary education, classroom practice

Introduction

Reading literacy is one of the most essential skills a child acquires during primary education. It forms the foundation for learning in all academic subjects and plays a crucial role in shaping students' thinking, communication, and problem-solving abilities. In today's rapidly changing world, the ability to understand and interpret written information is more important than ever.

International assessment programs such as the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) help educators evaluate how well students are prepared to meet these demands. PIRLS is conducted every five years by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) and focuses on assessing fourth-grade students' reading abilities. It examines how students read for literary experience and how they read to acquire and use information.

Although many students demonstrate basic reading skills, PIRLS results often reveal difficulties in deeper comprehension tasks. These include making inferences, interpreting ideas, and evaluating texts critically. This article aims to analyze these challenges and propose effective solutions that can be applied in real classroom environments.

Main Body 1: Understanding PIRLS and Reading Literacy Challenges

According to the PIRLS framework, reading literacy involves more than decoding words or reading fluently. It requires students to actively engage with texts, understand the author's intentions, connect ideas, and reflect on the meaning of what they read. A successful reader is able to retrieve information, interpret messages, and evaluate content based on evidence from the text.

However, classroom realities often show a different picture. Many students are trained to focus mainly on pronunciation and speed rather than comprehension. As a result, they can read a text aloud correctly but struggle to explain its meaning or express their opinions about it. PIRLS findings consistently show that students perform better on questions with direct answers, while they experience difficulties with open-ended and analytical tasks.

One common issue is that reading lessons frequently rely on short texts followed by simple factual questions. Such activities do not encourage critical thinking or deeper

engagement with the text. Students rarely have opportunities to discuss texts, ask questions, or explore alternative interpretations.

Consequently, their reading skills remain at a surface level.

Another challenge is limited exposure to different types of texts. In many classrooms, literary texts such as stories and fairy tales are emphasized, while informational texts receive less attention. Since PIRLS assesses both text types, students who lack experience with informational texts may feel unprepared and uncertain during the assessment.

Main Body 2: Causes and Solutions in the Context of Primary Education

Several factors contribute to weak reading comprehension skills among primary school students. One of the main factors is teaching methodology. Although educational reforms aim to promote student-centered learning, traditional teacher-centered approaches are still widely used. In such classrooms, students often listen passively and repeat information rather than actively engaging with texts.

Assessment practices also influence reading development. When students are evaluated mainly through short-answer questions, they are less motivated to explain their thoughts or justify their opinions. This limits the development of reasoning and inference skills, which are essential for success in PIRLS.

The home literacy environment is another important factor. Not all students have equal access to books or reading materials at home. In some families, regular reading habits are not well established, which affects vocabulary development and background knowledge. These elements are crucial for understanding complex texts.

To address these challenges, teachers should incorporate interactive reading strategies into their lessons. Activities such as group discussions, predicting outcomes, summarizing texts, and asking open-ended questions can significantly improve comprehension. Encouraging students to share their opinions and support them with evidence from the text helps develop critical thinking skills.

In addition, teachers should balance the use of literary and informational texts. Introducing real-life topics related to science, nature, and social issues can make reading more meaningful and engaging for students. Such an approach not only prepares students for PIRLS, but also helps them apply reading skills in everyday life.

Collaboration between schools and families is also essential. Schools can guide parents on how to support reading at home by recommending suitable books and encouraging shared reading activities. Strengthening this partnership can lead to long-term improvements in reading literacy.

Conclusion

The PIRLS assessment provides valuable insights into students' reading abilities and highlights important challenges in primary education. One of the most significant issues revealed by PIRLS is the limited development of higher-order reading comprehension skills. This problem is influenced by teaching methods, assessment practices, and home literacy environments.

By adopting student-centered, interactive, and reflective teaching approaches, educators can help students become more confident and thoughtful readers. Improving reading literacy not only leads to better PIRLS performance, but also prepares students for future academic success and lifelong learning. Developing strong reading skills at an early age is an investment in both individual growth and the overall quality of education.

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