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A LEVEL-BASED EXERCISE SYSTEM FOR DEVELOPING PHILOLOGY STUDENTS' READING COMPETENCE THROUGH ICT TOOLS

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Abstract
The article examines a level-based exercise system for developing reading competence among philology students through ICT tools. The proposed model includes five stages: Focusing, On the Line, Between the Lines, Beyond the Lines, and Reflection. The study argues that this sequence supports students' gradual movement from literal comprehension to inferential, critical, and reflective reading.

Keywords: Reading competence; level-based exercises; ICT; strategic reading; English language; philology students; inference; critical reading; reflection; digital learning.

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Introduction

In contemporary foreign language education, reading competence is increasingly interpreted not as a mechanical ability to decode or translate a written text, but as a complex academic and professional skill. It enables students to obtain information, understand its explicit and implicit meanings, interpret ideas, evaluate arguments and apply the acquired knowledge in educational, communicative and professional contexts. For philology students, this competence has particular importance, since their future professional activity is directly connected with texts, language analysis, translation, teaching, intercultural communication and academic research.

At the same time, the development of reading competence cannot be achieved through isolated comprehension questions or unsystematic reading tasks. When exercises are limited to vocabulary translation, factual questions or reproduction of separate details, students often remain at the level of surface comprehension. They may identify information stated directly in the text, but experience difficulties in interpreting hidden meanings, recognizing the author's position, evaluating arguments and reflecting on the relevance of the text to their academic or professional needs.

Grabe and Stoller [1] emphasize that reading is a complex interaction of linguistic knowledge, cognitive processing, background knowledge and strategic behaviour. This view shows that reading instruction should guide learners from basic orientation in the text to deeper

interpretation and evaluation. Alderson [2] also notes that reading involves different levels of comprehension, including explicit understanding, inference, interpretation and evaluation. Therefore, an effective system of exercises should not focus only on literal comprehension, but should gradually lead students toward higher-order reading operations.

The problem becomes particularly relevant in the context of ICT-based education. Digital tools, online platforms, automatic assessment and interactive tasks can support reading instruction only when they are integrated into a clear methodological system. Robert [3] argues that information technologies in education should serve didactic purposes rather than function as isolated technical instruments. Thus, ICT tools should not simply reproduce traditional paper-based exercises in electronic form; they should support the gradual development of reading strategies, feedback, self-correction and independent learning.

The purpose of this article is to present and methodologically justify a level-based exercise system for developing reading competence among philology students through ICT tools. The proposed model includes five interrelated stages: Focusing – On the Line – Between the Lines – Beyond the Lines – Reflection.

Literature review

The theoretical foundation of the proposed exercise system is based on competence-based, communicative-cognitive, strategic and digital-didactic approaches to teaching reading. These approaches make it possible to view reading as an active process of meaning construction rather than passive reception of written information.

According to the CEFR Companion Volume [4], reading as written reception includes different forms of understanding written texts, from identifying specific information to interpreting complex meanings and arguments. This approach is especially significant for higher education, where students are expected not only to understand texts but also to analyze, evaluate and use information for academic and professional purposes.

Nuttall [5] points out that effective reading instruction requires a purposeful organization of pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities. This idea supports the need for a staged system of exercises in which each task prepares learners for the next level of comprehension. Similarly, Day and Park [6] classify reading comprehension questions according to different cognitive levels, including literal comprehension, reorganization, inference, prediction, evaluation and personal response. Their classification confirms that reading tasks should not remain at one level, but should gradually encourage deeper processing of textual information.

Bloom's taxonomy [7] also provides a useful theoretical basis for designing reading exercises. It demonstrates that learning activities may develop from remembering and understanding to applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating. In reading instruction, this progression corresponds to the movement from identifying facts to interpreting meaning, evaluating ideas and expressing an independent position.

The social constructivist approach is equally important for the proposed model. Vygotsky [8] argues that learning develops through interaction, scaffolding and the gradual internalization of cognitive actions. In the context of reading instruction, this means that students need guided support before they are able to analyze and evaluate texts independently. Freire [9], in turn,

emphasizes the role of critical awareness and active engagement with meaning. From this perspective, reading should not be reduced to understanding the surface content of the text; it should help students question, interpret and relate textual information to broader academic, professional and social contexts.

Anderson [10] highlights the importance of metacognitive strategies in reading, including planning, monitoring and evaluating comprehension. These strategies are particularly relevant in ICT-based learning, where students often work independently and need to regulate their own reading process. Therefore, a level-based exercise system should include not only comprehension tasks, but also reflective and self-assessment activities.

Research methodology

The proposed model is based on the idea that reading competence develops gradually. Students first need to focus on the topic, vocabulary and general context of the text. Then they identify explicitly stated information, interpret implicit meanings, evaluate ideas beyond the text and finally reflect on their own understanding and learning process.

The model consists of five interconnected stages: Focusing, On the Line, Between the Lines, Beyond the Lines and Reflection. This sequence is methodologically important because it prevents students from moving too quickly to complex interpretation before they have understood the basic meaning of the text. At the same time, it prevents reading from being reduced to factual comprehension only. The model creates conditions for gradual movement from linguistic processing to cognitive, analytical, critical and reflective reading.

In this system, ICT tools are not treated as an additional decorative element of the lesson. They serve as a didactic mechanism that supports interaction with the text, immediate feedback, individual progress monitoring and independent learning. For example, digital platforms can be used for vocabulary preparation, automatic checking of literal comprehension, interactive inference tasks, online discussions and reflective self-assessment. However, the effectiveness of such tools depends on whether they are connected with the purpose of reading, the nature of the text and the level of the students.

The first stage, **Focusing**, prepares students for reading. Its main function is to activate background knowledge, introduce key vocabulary, clarify the reading purpose and direct students' attention to the topic of the text. At this stage, students may predict the content from the title, discuss key concepts, identify possible themes or answer introductory questions. Grabe and Stoller [1] note that background knowledge plays an important role in reading comprehension. If students have no initial orientation in the topic, they may focus only on separate words and fail to construct the general meaning of the text. In ICT-based learning, this stage can be organized through online warm-up questions, digital polls, matching activities, visual prompts, word clouds or interactive vocabulary exercises.

The second stage, **On the Line**, focuses on literal comprehension. At this stage, students work with information that is directly stated in the text. They identify facts, definitions, examples, names, dates, causes and explicitly expressed relationships. Alderson [2] emphasizes that literal comprehension is an essential foundation for further interpretation. Students cannot evaluate or infer meaning if they have not understood the information directly presented in the text. In

digital environments, this stage can be supported through multiple-choice questions, true/false tasks, matching headings, sequencing events, table completion and gap-filling exercises. Automatic assessment is particularly useful at this level because many literal comprehension tasks can be checked objectively and immediately.

The third stage, **Between the Lines**, develops inferential comprehension. At this level, students interpret information that is not directly stated but can be understood from context. They identify implied meanings, causes, consequences, attitudes, assumptions and logical connections. Day and Park [6] point out that inferential questions require learners to combine textual information with their own background knowledge. This makes inference an important step between literal understanding and critical interpretation. For philology students, inferential reading is especially important because academic and professional texts often contain implicit arguments, evaluative meanings and unstated assumptions. ICT tools can support this stage through cause-and-effect matching, implied meaning tasks, author's attitude questions, drag-and-drop reasoning activities and contextual inference exercises.

The fourth stage, **Beyond the Lines**, is connected with critical reading. At this stage, students move beyond the information given in the text and evaluate its ideas, arguments, reliability, relevance and possible applications. They may compare the text with another source, assess the author's position, identify bias or relate the content to professional practice. Bloom [7] places analysis and evaluation among higher-order cognitive processes. In reading instruction, these processes help students become not only receivers of information but also active interpreters and evaluators. Freire [9] also emphasizes that education should develop critical consciousness, allowing learners to question information and form their own position. In ICT-based learning, this stage may include online discussions, short written responses, argument evaluation, comparison charts, peer comments and problem-solving tasks based on the text.

The final stage, **Reflection**, develops students' metacognitive awareness. At this stage, students evaluate not only the content of the text but also their own reading process. They think about what they understood, what caused difficulty, which strategies helped them and how they can improve their reading in the future. Anderson [10] argues that metacognitive awareness is essential for successful reading because it enables learners to plan, monitor and evaluate their comprehension. Reflection tasks are especially important in digital learning environments, where students often work independently and need to regulate their own learning. ICT tools can support reflection through online self-assessment forms, learning diagrams, exit tickets, progress tracking and short feedback forms.

Table 1. Level-Based Exercise System for Developing Reading Competence

Stage	Main purpose	Reading level	Possible ICT-based tasks
Focusing	Activating background knowledge and setting the reading purpose	Pre-reading orientation	Polls, word clouds, matching, prediction tasks
On the Line	Understanding explicitly stated information	Literal comprehension	MCQ, true/false, matching, gap-filling
Between the Lines	Interpreting implicit meanings	Inferential comprehension	Cause-effect matching, implied meaning tasks, attitude questions
Beyond the Lines	Evaluating and applying ideas	Critical reading	Online discussion, argument evaluation, comparison tasks
Reflection	Evaluating one's own reading process	Metacognitive reading	Self-assessment, learning diary, reflective questions

As shown in Table 1, each stage of the model performs a specific didactic function. Together, these stages create a coherent system that guides students from initial orientation to independent reflection.

Results and discussion

The proposed exercise system has several methodological advantages. First, it provides gradual progression. Students do not move directly from reading a text to answering complex analytical questions. Instead, they pass through several stages that support comprehension, interpretation, evaluation and reflection. This progression is especially important for philology students, since their future professional activity requires the ability to work with texts at different levels of complexity.

Second, the model integrates different types of reading strategies. Focusing tasks develop prediction and activation of prior knowledge. On the Line tasks support scanning and careful reading for details. Between the Lines tasks develop inference and interpretation. Beyond the Lines tasks encourage critical reading and argument evaluation. Reflection tasks promote metacognitive awareness and learner autonomy. Thus, the model does not treat strategies as separate techniques, but integrates them into a coherent sequence of reading actions.

Third, the model is suitable for ICT-based learning. Each stage can be adapted to digital platforms, automatic assessment, interactive exercises and online feedback. This is important because ICT tools allow teachers to organize reading tasks in a more flexible and individualized way. At the same time, as Robert [3] notes, technology should serve didactic purposes. Therefore, digital tools are effective only when they are connected with clear methodological goals, appropriate texts and well-designed tasks.

Fourth, the system corresponds to the professional needs of philology students. Their future activity requires not only understanding texts but also analyzing language, interpreting meaning, evaluating arguments and using information in teaching, translation, research and intercultural communication. The proposed model supports these professional competencies by transforming reading into an active academic and professional process.

Finally, the model helps overcome one of the common problems in reading instruction: the dominance of literal comprehension tasks. Although literal understanding is necessary, it is not

sufficient for higher education. Students need to develop inferential, analytical, critical and reflective reading skills. The staged system makes this development more systematic and methodologically manageable.

Conclusion

A level-based exercise system is an important methodological condition for developing reading competence among philology students. The model **Focusing – On the Line – Between the Lines – Beyond the Lines – Reflection** allows teachers to organize reading instruction as a gradual movement from basic orientation and literal comprehension to inference, critical analysis and metacognitive reflection.

The analysis shows that each stage of the model has a specific didactic function. **Focusing** prepares students for reading and activates their background knowledge. **On the Line** tasks build literal understanding of the text. **Between the Lines** tasks develop inferential comprehension. **Beyond the Lines** tasks encourage critical interpretation and application of ideas. **Reflection** tasks help students evaluate their own reading process and become more autonomous learners.

The integration of ICT tools into this system increases its methodological potential. Digital platforms can provide interactive tasks, automatic assessment, immediate feedback, progress monitoring and opportunities for independent learning. However, technology should not be used mechanically. Its effectiveness depends on the quality of the exercise system, the relevance of the text, the clarity of reading objectives and the connection between tasks and strategies.

Thus, the proposed model can serve as a practical framework for designing reading tasks for philology students. It supports the development of linguistic, cognitive, strategic, critical and metacognitive aspects of reading competence and helps prepare future specialists for academic and professional work with texts.

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