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SPECIFICS OF THE PERCEPTION OF RUSSIAN CLASSICAL LITERATURE IN A FOREIGN EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

ESPECIFICIDADES DE LA PERCEPCIÓN DE LA LITERATURA CLÁSICA RUSA EN UN ENTORNO EDUCATIVO EXTRANJERO

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ABSTRACT

The article considers the specifics of the perception of Russian classical literature in a foreign educational environment. The authors conducted an experiment to determine the degree of students' proficiency in Russian literature of the 19th century in educational institutions of the Chechen Republic. The results show a significant appreciation and understanding of the concepts of ethics, national mentality, and national identity embedded in Russian classical literature among the survey participants. The conclusions emphasize the essential role of Russian classical literature in contributing to the spiritual and cultural development of students in the Chechen Republic. They also stipulate the need for methodological recommendations to enhance the teaching and comprehension of classical literary texts, suggesting the continuous relevance of Russian literature in fostering a multifaceted and culturally rich educational framework.

Keywords:

Spiritual and moral values, perception potential, national worldview, identity.

RESUMEN

El artículo examina las particularidades de la percepción de la literatura clásica rusa en un entorno educativo extranjero. Los autores llevaron a cabo un experimento para determinar el grado de dominio de la literatura rusa del sigloXIX por parte de los estudiantes de los centros educativos de la República de Chechenia. Los resultados muestran una apreciación y comprensión significativas de los conceptos de ética, mentalidad nacional e identidad nacional incluidos en la literatura clásica rusa entre los participantes en la encuesta. Las conclusiones subrayan el papel esencial de la literatura clásica rusa para contribuir al desarrollo espiritual y cultural de los estudiantes de la República de Chechenia. También estipulan la necesidad de recomendaciones metodológicas para mejorar la enseñanza y la comprensión de los textos literarios clásicos, sugiriendo la continua relevancia de la literatura rusa en el fomento de un marco educativo multifacético y culturalmente rico.

Palabras clave:

Espirituales y morales, potencial de percepción, cosmovisión nacional, identidad.

INTRODUCTION

The relevance of studying the perception of Russian classical literature by the modern national audience of the Chechen Republic is stipulated by the need to seek new values for young people and comprehend the richness of Russian literature and the influence of Russian culture on the youth along with their national culture (Alimova et al., 2023; Bodina & Telysheva, 2023), which is a basis to its ethnocultural mentality (Aipova et al., 2023; Ling et al., 2023). Considering the multicultural space and various aspects of the Chechen ethnicity, its education system is built on the harmonious coexistence of not only Chechen and Russian but also other cultures of peoples inhabiting Russia (Togaibayeva et al., 2023; Zhuzeyev et al., 2024). Based on this and other important factors (the bilingual nature of education, *“the need to create conditions for the younger generation of multinational people to perceive basic ethnocultural values”* (Levitskaya, 2017, p. 4), the research topic is extremely relevant and significant.

The reception of 19th-century Russian classical literature within non-native linguistic educational contexts is a recurring topic within the scholarly discourse that has been addressed by numerous scientists and continues to generate significant academic interest.

The collective contribution of such scholars as (Shchukin, 1998; Zagidullina, 2002; Yeromasova, 2007; Dymina, 2010; Yandarbiev, 2011); Levitskaya (2017); Mekhtiev, 2019; Sokolova, 2019; Siyapova, 2021; Logutova, 2022; Ismailova, 2023; Yakhyaeva, 2023; Uzdeeva, 2023), emphasizes the multifaceted nature of the region.

Their work enriches our understanding of how Russian classical literature is navigated and valued in contexts beyond its cultural and linguistic origins, emphasizing the dynamics of literary reception in diverse educational spaces.

The novelty of the study is determined by the fact that the perception of artistic texts of Russian classical literature of the 19th century in the Chechen education system has not been considered in a scientific context.

The objective is to analyze the perception of Russian classical literature in the international educational environment as exemplified by schools and pedagogical universities in the Chechen Republic. To attain this objective, the following **tasks** are indicated: to prepare a set of test tasks based on Russian authors who covered Caucasian themes; to summarize the results of the survey and develop the best ways of teaching Russian classical literature of the 19th century in the system of school and university education.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We used statistical analysis as the most effective method in determining the educational space of the region. In the course of the study, we selected a corpus of Russian literary works on Caucasian themes (A.S. Pushkin, M.Yu. Lermontov, L.N. Tolstoy). The works by I.S. Turgenev and L.N. Tolstoy were analyzed as the most fully embracing the Caucasian and Russian identity.

Our study covered the perception of literary texts. To conduct the experiment, we developed five test tasks of different difficulty levels. These tasks checked the knowledge of Russian classical literature, as well as the ability to detect primary and secondary reader potential. Some tests were formulated in the context of the state task. They had questions about ethnicity as a concept, national identity, and national and foreign character.

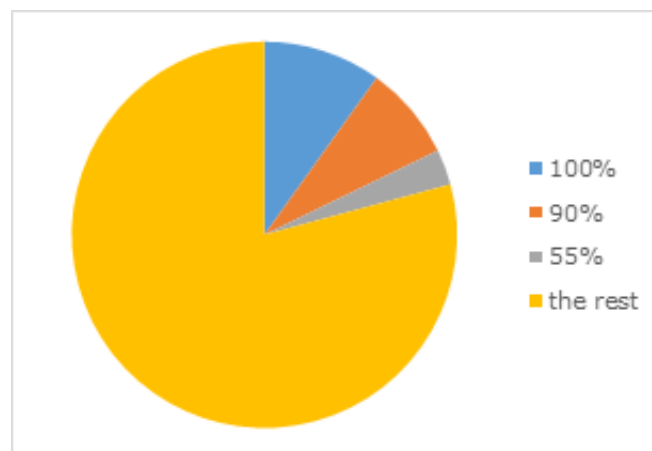
The experiment was conducted in Gymnasium No. 5 and Secondary School No. 8 in Grozny. The sampling included 100 schoolchildren attending grades 9-10.

Testing was expanded to fourth- and fifth-year students of the specialty “Russian Language” and “Literature” at the Chechen State Pedagogical University. All in all, 100 students participated in the experiment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study conducted in Gymnasium No. 5 showed good knowledge in the field of Russian literature of the 19th century (Pushkin, Lermontov, Tolstoy) (Figure 1) and a comprehensive understanding and acceptance of such concepts such as ethnos, national mentality, and national identity.

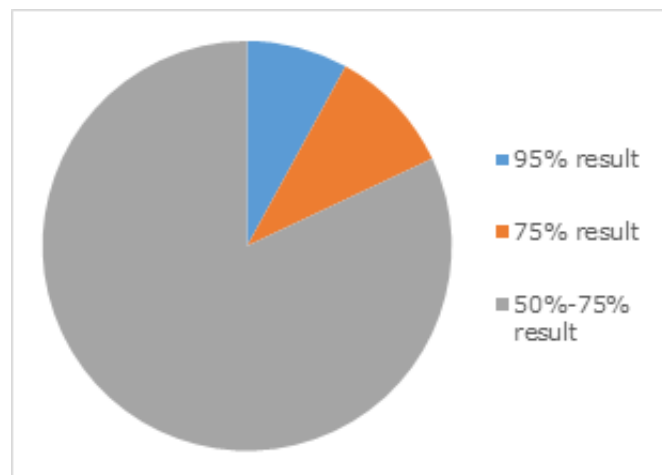
Figure 1. Test results for schoolchildren.



Source: Preparation of authors

All 100 students answered 30 test questions on Russian classical literature of the 19th century (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Test results for students.



Source: Preparation of authors

Despite globalization, the dialogue between cultures, the expansion of cultural space, and the communication of various national traditions are still relevant (Sokolova, 2019). Our research proves that the existing connection between theoretical, historical, and literary knowledge and specific artistic material is mandatory since students from the Faculty of Philology inevitably work with the same text several times. The preliminary knowledge of literary terms and concepts, the stages of development of Russian literature of the 19th century, and other works help them analyze a specific text. Thus, the wording of some test tasks differed in their general theoretical orientation (method, genre, topic). These tests are designed to activate the thinking ability of not only students but also schoolchildren since *“school is a historically established public cultural institution and is included in the general mechanisms of cultural transmission”* (Demina, 2010, p. 258). The active mastery of Russian classical literature of the 19th century creates a monolithic cultural basis for further development.

The education of a modern student depends on the quality of reading, as well as methods and techniques for studying literary texts (Ismailova, 2023). Pushkin and Lermontov made a great contribution to this sphere with their poems (“Tazit”, “Prisoner of the Caucasus”, “Ismail Bey”, “Aul Bastundji”, “Kally”, “Circassians”, “Haji-Abrek”). In the course of the study, it was discovered that the respondents had good knowledge of the Russian authors of the 19th century, especially Lermontov. This Russian poet is acclaimed by the Chechen audience due to his

contact with the region’s history and participation in the Caucasian War (1817-1864). However, fewer respondents read Pushkin’s poem “Tazit”. The poem which became a literary phenomenon of its time was overlooked even by experienced school teachers who gave preference to another poem “The Prisoner of the Caucasus”.

A foreign character was created in the story “Haji Murat” by Tolstoy. It is beautiful in depicting human dignity. This makes the main character a legend of the Caucasus (Siyapova, 2021). The test tasks checked the knowledge of the plot, landscape descriptions, and the Chechen song included in the story. The motive of the blood feud was carefully analyzed. A set of test tasks also addressed this matter. The right answer was given only by half of the respondents. This is explained by the fact that Tolstoy’s motive of the blood feud is complex and requires very careful reading of the text. This story by the Russian author was well known to the audience (both schoolchildren and students). They mastered both the text and its storyline.

There were questions concerning the Russian authors who depicted the Caucasus. The respondents easily and quickly named Pushkin, Lermontov, and Tolstoy as authors who devoted their works to the Caucasus. However, most of them forgot about A.A. Bestuzhev-Marlinsky. This is due to the fact that the writer is not included in the school curriculum. In university programs, Bestuzhev-Marlinsky is present only in sections on the Russian romanticism of the early 19th century. At the Chechen State Pedagogical University, the situation is better and Bestuzhev-Marlinsky’s works are studied within the framework of the special seminar “Local Literary History”. His stories about the Caucasus “Mulla-Nur”, “Ammalat-bek”, and others touch upon a variety of aspects.

Almost all the respondents made mistakes about Lermontov’s stay in the Caucasus. They answered that Lermontov visited the Caucasus twice guided by the number of the poet’s references (1837, 1840). The respondents missed events from the poet’s childhood when his grandmother Elizaveta Arsenyeva brought him to Mineralnye Vody three times. In total, Lermontov visited the region five times.

The study proved that schoolchildren and students correctly understood the concept of national mentality as a way of life, thoughts, traits of character, and language of the people. Almost all of them identified the main features of highlanders which aroused the sympathy of the Russian poets. This includes courage, belligerence, and the love of freedom. Schoolchildren, along with students, found the similarities between the Caucasian blood feud and the Russian duel. In both cases, it is the protection

of honor and dignity, with the only difference that *“by the second half of the 19th century, the duel began to become obsolete, and deviations from the dueling code became acceptable”* (Yakhyaeva, 2023, p. 164). On the contrary, the tradition of blood feuds in the national mentality of the Chechens still holds its ground.

Questions on this aspect were included in the test. Some of them remained unanswered due to the students' lack of understanding of this custom. It was difficult for them to describe the funerals of people “unavenged” in a blood feud. The modern youth is unaware of the distant highlander's custom (i.e., placing columns over the graves of the “unavenged”). They learned this information from the Russian poets, in particular, Lermontov, who knew almost everything about this custom. This is noticeable when reading Lermontov's poems devoted to the Caucasus.

The Russian poets who described both the Caucasian and European mentality (“Tazit” by Pushkin, “Haji-Abrek” by Lermontov) are positively perceived by the modern Chechen youth as the discoverers of the Caucasus for Russia because the country promotes the “awareness of one's national image”. (Uzdeeva, 2023, p. 186)

In recent years, scientific works on the role and significance of Russian literature in the life of Russian regions have mentioned that *“Russia is not a random accumulation of territories and tribes but a living, historically grown, and culturally justified organism”* (Ilin, 1995, p. 24). Thus, it is impossible to underestimate the role of literature in this *“organism”*. *It is known that “classics are not devalued but take on a different form in a new artistic space and a new era”* (Zagidullina, 2002, p. 31). An interest in Russian literature, especially in the authors who visited the Caucasus, knew the Caucasian mentality, and dedicated their works to the theme of the Caucasus, has been maintained and even intensified in recent decades.

Guided by the conviction that *“the family is a key link that transmits the norms and values of society to an individual”* (Eromasova, 2007, p. 55), the Russian writers of the 19th century created their own idea of family values. *“The major estates depicted by these authors were the guardians of the Russian culture and were marked by its specifics”* (Logutova, 2022, p. 24). Turgenev's novels represent the cherished image of the author's Russia. It was recreated carefully and with filial love. Turgenev was a realist and was far from the total idealization of “nests of gentlefolk”. The author persistently and inevitably showed both worthy and unworthy people of this class.

The “family” concept is realized in Russian novels not only through human images (men, women, and children) but also through images of estates and houses. A house is a

home for a family, a sacred place where it all began. *“The Turgenev estate embodies the European civilized beginning in the Russian culture of the New Age”* (Shchukin, 1998, p. 169). The estates of the Kalitins, Stakhovs, Kirsanovs, and Lavretskys are the native cradles of Turgenev's characters, i.e., a part of their homeland.

Russian classical literature traditionally measures the stability and strength of social foundations through family and family relationships. Russian literature always dwells on the attitude of sons to the past of their fatherland and their ability to inherit the moral values of their fathers. Historical development caused by changing generations and leading to the inevitable conflict of “fathers” and “sons” also shows the eternal love of sons for fathers and fathers for their children.

Fictional noble families live in Russian estates with gardens, parks, servants, nannies, and tutors. The estate culture of the 19th century is inextricably linked with the life and lifestyle of the Russian nobility. The range of our test tasks was also associated with the representation of national worldview in Russian literary works. While living in these estates, they loved and forgave, saw off and greeted, kept hoping and lost their heart. Those families immersed in the estate context are the Russian families. Their national identity lies in strong family ties, love for each other, and attachment to their homeland. Currently, the family is affected by destructive processes, and Russian classical literature reminds readers that the basis of Russian statehood has always been the family. Its traditional components (love, mutual respect, warmth, and home comfort) are eternal values like the eternal ethno-mental beginning of the people.

The test tasks related to the novel “War and Peace” were completed by most respondents. It means that students have a diverse understanding of the novel as a universal text that reveals the Russian noble mentality. The proposed tests also contained questions about the meaning of italics in the artistic text. The emphasis was on the fact that *“the word for Tolstoy is the foundation for creating an artistic model”*. (Mekhtiev, 2019, p. 146)

CONCLUSIONS

The conducted experiment demonstrated that Russian classical literature is positively perceived by students and school audiences in Chechnya. Our observations helped to form methodological guidelines for school literature teachers and university professors to ensure better mastering, interpreting, and understanding of classical literary texts.

Our conclusions highlight the importance of contextualized teaching methods that consider both the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students. This approach facilitates a better understanding of literature, expanding mere linguistic comprehension with cultural nuances and historical contexts. Furthermore, the research emphasizes the necessity for educational curriculums to incorporate teaching strategies adapted to the diverse cultural backgrounds of learners.

Exploring innovative teaching methods, integrating digital technologies into literary education, and determining reception dynamics in different cultural contexts are promising directions for further research.

This topic, which has a multi-aspect solution within the existing multicultural and bilingual educational space of the region, is relevant since there is an active interaction of cultures and spiritual and moral paradigms of the peoples and nationalities inhabiting Russia.

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