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## ***The Role of the Essay-Test in Acquiring Reading and Reading Comprehension Skills***

### **Extended summary**

The main goal of this paper is to consider the role of the essay test in acquiring reading and comprehension skills, as well as the importance of the essay test for obtaining feedback on reading comprehension in regular classes of Serbian language and literature, suitable for older elementary school classes.

The importance of introducing essay tests in regular classes, and not only to test students' knowledge at the end of the second cycle of compulsory education, is reflected in the problematic approach to interpreting the selected text (literary, artistic, or other type), harmonized with the analysis of students' emotional behavior during the reading and comprehension itself. This approach enables the leading artistic values of the literary template included in the "body" of the task, which is called an essay-test, to be considered and explained in a unified setting. The purpose of the essay test is also acquired in the need to assess the development of students' reading literacy.

The methodological approach to this topic is based on the laws of the methodology of teaching literature and the Serbian language. First, it is considered which interpretive abilities and reading competencies the student demonstrates when approaching the essay-test, through: insight into the skill of localizing a shorter representative passage into a superior literary whole; observation and interpretation of leading expressive and creative procedures through which a special world of a specific work is formed; recognizing and interpreting appropriate forms of

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narration; character interpretations and characterization procedures; linguistic-stylistic analysis of the text; observation and analysis of the artistic role of literary details and linking the observed properties of the text of a representative passage with other appropriate contents from the text as a whole.

Then, the importance of receiving feedback from students is pointed out, whereby the observed shortcomings in further work with students are corrected and the developed knowledge is included in new processing and creatively expanded. Then, the role of the genre in understanding the text and the ability of the young reader to receive aesthetic information are emphasized. The importance of the skill of quickly finding information with which to build “open type” answers, which the essay-test implies, is pointed out.

The theoretical framework for compiling tasks and analyzing the test results is based on an interdisciplinary approach to poetics and cognitive psychology, whose views are complementary to thinking about the reading process, constructing the meaning of the text and the reader’s response.

The construction of the test is precisely directed towards a certain goal with a certain purpose – in order to diagnose the development of key competencies of the examined students at the class level and to determine the minimum achievement according to the set criteria.

The cognitive complexity of the tested tasks is examined in relation to the following variables: the nature of the text that is assumed to correspond to the chosen age of students (word semantics, syntax, local and global coherence of the text), task type (reader response requirement) and competencies, reading experience, reading skills and strategies). The intelligence factor is not considered, although it is assumed that its effect on solving the test is great.

It is concluded that:

- 1) essay-test encourages students to actively read and gain a deeper understanding of what is read, with the functionalization of teaching in the foreground - the students are able to express their own opinions, take a critical stance regarding the information learned in the read text, and to explain their attitudes;
- 2) reading construct, presented by an essay-test, indirectly measures reading competencies and provides basic information about the developed abilities of students in the teaching area of reading;
- 3) developing the interpretation of an artistic text is a particularly important competence with which the student enriches his/her own experience and shapes his/her inner world through poetic information - students develop the ability for a more complete understanding of themselves and their environment;
- 4) reflection on the text, as a metacognitive reading strategy, should be developed during schooling in order to critically approach any future text in accepting or rejecting information that is not credible, meaningful, or does not correspond to the adopted views of the individual;
- 5) The most important role of the essay test in the teaching of Serbian language and literature is precisely to strengthen students’ reading competencies.

**Keywords:** essay-test, reading construct, cognitive poetics, reading literacy

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