Pedagogical dimensions of children literature fostering learning and development

Hoda Abuo Afash¹

¹ Teacher, PhD student; Kee Bear Sheva College; Israel

Abstract. Children’s literature serves as a cornerstone in education, bridging entertainment and enlightenment for young minds. Stories and poems designed for children foster self-understanding, empathy, and language appreciation. Their key role in cultivating creativity, a love for learning, and emotional engagement cannot be overstated. Integrating literature into classrooms not only enhances language skills but also nurtures comprehensive learning experiences, involving the entirety of a child's persona. Diverse definitions by experts underscore the multifaceted nature of children’s literature, encompassing a spectrum from entertainment to education and personal growth. The dynamic language within these narratives evolves with each generation, reflecting societal changes and engaging youthful imaginations. Examining linguistic elements reveals how storytelling conventions, vocabulary, and social themes intertwine, illustrating the intricate relationship between language and societal constructs within these texts.

Keywords: children literature
learning
learner’s development
language
Introduction

Ever since children have learned to read, there has been children’s literature. Children's stories and poems are an important part of the learning process for children. They help learners understand themselves and others better. Also, children literature help students explore the world and appreciate language. Most importantly, it fuels creativity and a love of learning. The use of stories in the classroom is crucial for developing language skills in young learners. More than just entertainment, stories bring out strong emotions in students.

Incorporating literature into lessons makes learning more comprehensive. Diving into children literature encourages students to embrace their feelings, thoughts, and experiences. This creates a learning experience that engages the whole person. In this context, children literature is seen as a powerful educational tool because it captures attention and inspires a lifelong love of reading and personal growth.

Numerous studies focus on the use of children's literature in personality development, exploring its impact from various angles. It's essential to highlight that all these studies affirm children's literature multifaceted role in students' education.

Literature review

Speaking of the concept, there are more definitions that outline children’s literature. More researchers refer to a body of written works and accompanying illustrations created to entertain or educate young people. The genre includes a wide range of works, such as classic world literature, picture books, easy-to-read stories, fairy tales, lullabies, fables, folk songs, and other materials that are primarily orally transmitted. Fadiman's "Children's Literature" defines the genre to include picture books and any other text expressly written for children [3]. The Library of Congress defines children's literature as material written and produced for the information or entertainment of children and young adults, which includes all non-fiction, literary and artistic genres and physical formats [15]. According to Signes et al. (2017), children's literature is narratives that can be presented in...
oral and/or written form, which young readers find particularly interesting. Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott's "A History of Children's Literature" define it as a branch of literature that seeks to entertain, educate, and inspire readers from birth to adolescence [11]. The definition emphasizes the multifaceted nature of children's literature, encompassing entertainment, education, and personal growth for young readers across various developmental stages. Jane Yolen's "Touch Magic: Making the Most of Children's Literature" believes that children's literature plays a great role in fostering empathy, self-discovery, and a deeper understanding of the world through relatable stories and diverse perspectives: “Stories are mirrors in which we can all see ourselves, and the images we see may help us to better understand others, and indeed, to better understand ourselves” [13].

Analyzing Texts for Children: Linguistics and Stylistics

The language of children's literature is not static. It's a living, breathing entity that evolves with each generation, reflecting the changing world and the ever-curious minds of young readers. By understanding and appreciating the styles, registers, and fiction at play, we can nurture a love for language, spark imagination, and guide children on their own literary adventures.

The language used in fiction written for children seems to offer common ways of telling stories by using certain words and sentence structures. The classic beginning "Once upon a time" not only introduces the story but also hints that familiar narrative forms will follow with familiar vocabulary and grammar. The topics and lessons in these stories are depictions of social situations and values, and how society works is tied to the language used to describe it. In other words, the back-and-forth between authors and readers happens within complex webs of social relationships through language.

Also, children literature can encounter a wide variety of language styles so young readers discover them in their reading. Some styles will seem familiar and easy to understand because the vocabulary and grammar are like everyday speech, others may seem less familiar either because the words are
specific to a different culture or region (like British English vs. American English) or because authors choose to use language forms mostly seen in fiction stories or certain types of fiction develop their own distinctive styles of communication. Books about similar topics will differ not just in their content but in the language tools used to depict the topic. For example, many children’s books are about “growing up,” but since this theme appears in very different texts from The Hobbit to Can You Sue Your Parents for Malpractice?, the topic alone can’t clearly separate one type of book from another.

Children literature offer many options when speaking about styles. These include fantasy and realism genres, with further differences within those like fantasy grounded in the real world versus fantasy set in an imaginary place. Choosing a style involves engaging with a "discourse," a combination of common story structures, social aspects, and language practices seen in that style. A discourse can be thought of as having a distinctive flavor to the extent that it is distinguished from others by recurring patterns or codes in its language choices. These patterns might include common vocabulary, grammar rules, types and frequency of figurative language, typical ways of linking events or characters, and the perspective or "voice" describing what's happening.

Children's literature often presents a narrative that encourages readers to adopt a specific perspective, which can vary based on their familiarity with the genre, language community, linguistic abilities, and personal characteristics. The language techniques used are extensive, primarily employing first or third-person narration, single or multiple points of view, and direct or indirect speech to establish the encoded perspective. Together, the broader genre aspects and specific language choices seem to restrict the possibility of wildly different interpretations. However, what might seem like more likely interpretations depends on familiarity with the particular discourse style. If readers lack that familiarity, their interpretations may seem unusual.

When it comes to the register, children's literature employs age-appropriate language. Picture books use simple...
vocabulary and short sentences. Each character speaks in their own voice, reflecting their personality, background, and age. A mischievous imp might chatter playfully, while a wise elder might speak in measured tones. This vocal diversity adds depth and realism to the story. The narrator's voice can be a playful guide, a trusted confidante, or even a mischievous trickster.

Children's literature covers a broad spectrum of genres, including whimsical fairy tales and gritty realistic fiction. This enables young readers to uncover their preferences, venture into different worlds, and gain knowledge of diverse experiences. Authors employ a variety of techniques to keep readers engaged. Cliffhangers build anticipation, plot twists surprise, and humor lightens the mood. These elements create a dynamic reading experience that keeps children turning pages. Characters are essential to the core of every story. Children's literature excels at creating relatable characters who grow, learn, and face challenges. Witnessing their journeys fosters empathy, resilience, and a sense of self-discovery in young readers [16].

Also, children's literature offers many different types of stories for readers to explore. They can find tales of princesses and magic or realistic stories about everyday life. Mysteries with clues and plot twists will keep them guessing until the very end. For those who love adventure, fantasy worlds await with mythical creatures and epic quests. Poetry, humor, and folktales each provide valuable lessons as well. Every genre presents new worlds that spark creativity and fill children with wonder. Whether it's a fairy tale, mystery, or work of fantasy, picking up a book opens the door to literary discovery. Children's literature offers a vast world of genres, each fueling children's imagination and sparking learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Genres in children's literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Picture Books</td>
<td>Interdependence of art and text. Story of Concept presented through combination of text and illustration. Classification based on format, not genre. All genres appear in picture books.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table continuation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poetry and Verse</td>
<td>Condensed language, imagery. Distilled, rhythmic expression of imaginative thoughts and perceptions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folklore</td>
<td>Literary heritage of humankind. Traditional stories, myths, legends, nursery rhymes, and songs from the past. Oral tradition; no known author.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>Imaginative worlds, make-believe. Stories set in places that do not exist, about people and creatures that could not exist, or events that could not happen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Fiction</td>
<td>Based on extending physical laws and scientific principles to their logical outcomes. Stories about what might occur in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic Fiction</td>
<td>&quot;What if&quot; stories, illusion of reality. Events could happen in real world, characters seem real; contemporary setting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Fiction</td>
<td>Set in the past, could have happened. Story reconstructs events of past age, things that could have or did occur.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once we introduced the main genres, let’s analyze the most common themes in children's literature. They are: relationships (family, friendships); emotions (compassion, accepting); behavior (generosity, persistence); life transitions (growing up, grief); social issues (fairness, injustice).

**The main functions of children literature**

Children's literature serves multiple functions that significantly impact children cognitive, emotional, and moral development.

**Thematic Function**: Themes in literature serve as the pivot around which stories revolve. For children, these themes are often imbued with elements of adventure and the extraordinary, capturing their imagination in fantastical worlds or within the animal kingdom. Teachers strategically tailor the choice of characters and actions to match the cognitive level of their young audience. Beginning with fairy tales and gradually progressing to more complex narratives, they navigate the psychological traits of children, guiding their literary
journey through heroes with supernatural abilities or non-speaking entities.

Adaptation to External Influences: Modern influences like culture, media, and the internet dynamically shape children's literary preferences, steering them towards contemporary readings over traditional classics. For example, the allure of "Harry Potter" often surpasses that of revered classics like I.L. Caragiale's "D-l Goe."

Phraseological Function: This function emphasizes the practical application of educational methods. However, an educational system solely dictating readings might distance children from the inherent educational value in literature. Granting children, the autonomy to select texts fosters a deeper engagement and a hunger for knowledge. By allowing them to propose and explore optional materials, educators encourage critical thinking and emotional connections with the content.

Development Function: Children decode, analyze, and interpret information from literary texts through repeated readings. Teachers guide this process, aiding readers in extracting the essence and depth of meaning from the text.

Axiological Function: Literature, particularly in educational settings, is instrumental in shaping aesthetic and moral values. Yet, evaluating personal growth within set timeframes can be challenging. Hence, literature acts as a catalyst for emotional and imaginative development, supplementing formal education with crucial life lessons. To ensure holistic development, parents play a vital role in extending this learning beyond school hours.

Psychological Impact: The act of reading invokes cognitive and emotional responses in children. This reading dichotomy—education-driven and self-initiated—shapes their relationship with literature. Various elements like writing style, layout, and visual aids deeply influence interest and pleasure in reading, reflecting personal values and preferences [13].

Children's literature plays a crucial role in shaping a child's understanding of the world and the values they hold dear.

It is more than just entertainment; it's a powerful tool for fostering emotional, social, and cognitive development.
How does children's literature transmit values?

– Themes and storylines: Through engaging narratives, authors explore themes like kindness, responsibility, courage, honesty, and respect. Children identify with characters and their choices, internalizing the lessons embedded within the story.
– Character portrayal: Authors often create characters who embody specific values. Observing how good-hearted characters like Peter Pan face challenges reinforces the importance of bravery and loyalty. Conversely, negative characters like the Wicked Witch can illustrate the consequences of deceit and cruelty.
– Figurative language and symbolism: Authors use metaphors, similes, and other figures of speech to convey values in subtle ways. For example, comparing a character's heart to gold might symbolize their generosity.
– Illustrations and design: Visuals often reinforce the text's message. A picture of a family helping each other during a natural disaster can visually communicate the value of cooperation.

What values are commonly found in children's literature?

– Universal values: Kindness, honesty, respect, and responsibility are often emphasized across cultures.
– Cultural values: Children's literature can also reflect specific cultural values. For example, a story set in Japan might highlight the importance of filial piety.
– Personal values: Books can explore more personal values like self-acceptance, perseverance, and empathy, helping children navigate their own emotions and experiences.

The impact of values in children's literature:

– Moral development: By understanding different values and their consequences, children learn to make good choices and develop their own moral compass.
– Social development: Books promote understanding and empathy, encouraging children to see things from others' perspectives and value social connections.
– Emotional development: Stories help children identify and manage their emotions, providing safe spaces to explore complex feelings like fear, sadness, and anger.
– Cognitive development: Engaging narratives stimulate
imagination, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.

Figure 1
Children's Literature Functions and Pedagogical Advantages

Choosing quality children's literature:
- Age-appropriateness: Ensure the themes and complexity of the book match the child's developmental stage.
- Representation and diversity: Look for books that reflect the richness of human experience and celebrate different cultures and identities.
- Positive messages: Prioritize books that promote positive values and avoid those that reinforce harmful stereotypes or prejudices.
- Open discussions: Discussing the book's themes and values with children deepens their understanding and encourages critical thinking.

Remember, children's literature is a rich tapestry woven with words, illustrations, and values. By carefully choosing books and engaging in meaningful discussions, parents and educators can empower children to navigate the world with compassion, curiosity, and a strong sense of right and wrong.

Building on the previous discussion, let's dive deeper into how linguistics and stylistics can illuminate the magic of children's literature [1]:

Benefits of Analysis:
- Enhanced Reading Comprehension: Analyzing texts strengthens critical thinking skills, improves interpretation, and deepens understanding of authorial intent.

- Developing Literary Appreciation: Studying language use fosters a love for language, sensitivity to style, and an appreciation for the craft of writing.

- Promoting Language Acquisition: Exploring sound patterns, wordplay, and vocabulary acquisition aids young readers in developing their own language skills.

- Cultivating Cultural Awareness: Examining diverse voices and cultural references expands children's understanding of different perspectives and traditions.

Using stories, poems, and books meant for children can be a really good way for teachers to teach important lessons in school. Teachers use children's literature to develop values, focus on moral messages, and also different subjects in an engaging way. For example, a teacher might read a story about sharing to teach students the value of generosity and cooperation. By seeing the characters in the story share and work together, students can understand the importance of these qualities in their own lives.

Stories also help students think critically and develop empathy for others. When reading a story, students are often asked to analyze the characters' actions and motivations. This encourages them to think deeply about the choices characters make and the consequences of those choices. For instance, a teacher might read a story about a character who faces a difficult decision and discuss with the students the different options the character had and the potential outcomes of each choice. This helps students develop their critical thinking skills and consider the perspectives of others.

Children's literature is also a great way to introduce students to different cultures and traditions. By reading stories from around the world, students can learn about different customs, beliefs, and ways of life. For instance, a teacher might read a folk tale from Japan to teach students about Japanese culture and values. This not only broadens their understanding of the world, but also promotes tolerance and appreciation for diversity.
Incorporating children's literature into lessons not only enhances language skills, but also makes complex topics more relatable and easier to grasp. For example, a teacher might use a picture book about the water cycle to teach students about the scientific process of evaporation, condensation, and precipitation. By visually representing these concepts in a story format, students can better understand and remember the information.

Overall, using children's literature in the classroom enriches the learning experience and fosters a lifelong love of reading and learning. By engaging students with relatable stories and diverse perspectives, teachers can create a positive and inclusive learning environment.

References:

[1] Burea S., Fairy tales, more reasons of their presence in teaching-learning activities. In: Materialele Conferinței Republicane a Cadrelor Didactice, 2018 [PDF] from idsi.md


