

## DEVELOPING READING COMPREHENSION COMPETENCE FOR GRADE 10 STUDENTS IN VIETNAM IN TEACHING EPIC POETRY

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### ABSTRACT

The general education program in Vietnam has changed to match the requirements of practice and international education trends. According to the roadmap for changing Philology textbooks, starting from the 2022-2023 school year, textbooks of grade 10 Philology under the new general education program in Vietnam have been officially put into teaching nationwide. There are many innovative points in this change of curricula and textbooks of Philology in Vietnam. Therefore, how to develop reading comprehension competence of literary texts in general and epic poetry in particular for students is a concern of many teachers. Therefore, in this article, we present the main features of epic poetry and propose teaching measures to develop the reading comprehension competence of epic poetry for grade 10 students in Vietnam.

**Keywords:** Competence, Reading Comprehension, Grade 10 Students, Epic Poetry.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Statement Of The Problem

The socio-economic development in the context of globalization poses innovative requirements for the cause of education. Recognizing that, Vietnam has had new educational development orientations. Resolution No. 29 dated November 4, 2013 of the 8th Plenum of the 11th Central Committee on fundamental and comprehensive reform of education and training clearly stated: "Development of education and training is to raise people's knowledge, train human resources, and foster talents. The educational process must be strongly shifted from mainly equipping knowledge to comprehensively developing learners' competencies and qualities. Learning must go with practice; theory is associated with practice; School education combines with family education and social education". On the basis of the practice and development trend of world education, the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam has built the general education curriculum in Philology 2018 in the direction of competence development. The program "takes the training of communication skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) as the main axis throughout all three levels in order to meet the requirements of the competence-oriented program and ensure the learning continuity and consistency in all classes". In the context of reforming the general education program from focusing on equipping knowledge to helping learners develop their qualities and competencies, teaching subjects in general and Philology in particular also needs to change in that spirit.

Reading comprehension is a skill required throughout a person's life. At first, we learn to read; then, we read to learn and to live. With the ability to read and understand, we will be able to succeed in school and in life. This has been confirmed in the report of the American College of Examinations (2008).

In Vietnam, in the 2018 program, literary texts account for a large number of rich and diverse genres, such as stories, novels, poems, folk songs, proverbs... epic poetry is a type of text that is difficult to read with many unique characteristics compared to other genres. Epic poetry is a valuable asset of Vietnamese folklore in particular and the world in general because it includes works of art that are "inimitable" and "produced under social conditions that can never be returned" (Karl Marx).

## **2. RESEARCH METHODS**

To conduct this study, we used the method of retrospective documentation to study documents related to epic poetry, competence development teaching, and 2018 general education curriculum in Philology in Vietnam. On that basis, we conducted an analysis to propose requirements and teaching methods to develop reading comprehension of epic poetry for grade 10 students in Vietnam.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **3.1. Overview of the epic poetry**

#### **3.1.1. Definition**

There are some definitions of epic poetry, but in this article, we use the definition in the Dictionary of Literary Terminology of the group of authors Le Ba Han, Tran Dinh Su and Nguyen Khac Phi: "Epic poetry is a genre of long narrative works (usually poetry), appearing early in the literary history of nations in order to praise the heroic cause which is universal and has great historical significance".

#### **3.1.2. Some characteristics of epic poetry**

##### **3.1.2.1. Content of epic poetry**

Epic poetry focuses on the topic of national history and describes important events that are decisive for the spiritual life and destiny of the nation such as nation building, fighting against foreign invaders, conquering nature...

In epic poetry, we meet great inspirations, great loves such as heroic inspiration, freedom, love for the homeland... National consciousness and community consciousness are the source of this genre. Later, modern epic poetry also appeared when national history issues such as national destiny and national honor were put on top.

In epic compositions, the strong will of the community stands out and affirms the community's existence with great purposes: disputes, land preservation, fighting between communities, territorial expansion, areas of operation, conquest of nature, social reform, wars of national liberation, revolution, change, and challenges for the survival of the country... Therefore, epic poetry is the "generalization of the nation's history", creating a "picture of national spirit" (Hegel) with "using the people's point of view to consider the facts, without separating oneself from those facts" (Belinsky).

In epic poetry, there is always a connection between individuals and collectives, members and communities. Individuals always have a sense of voluntary association with the community in duty, responsibility and honor. Victory or defeat is more conscious than ever because it is always decisive for the community's destiny. This is the basis of the relationship between the hero and his collective.

### **3.1.2.2. Epic conflict**

Epic conflicts are community conflicts, such as the war between tribes, struggle between man and nature, religion, custom... clearly showing history and times. In epic conflicts, war conflicts between communities are the most common, so war becomes the central theme of this genre. In addition, there are other conflicts in epic poetry, such as the war between man and nature, conflicts over customs, rituals....Epic conflicts are rich but consistent in showing courage, strength, spirit, national wisdom and historical era.

### **3.1.2.3. Epic characters**

The hero and the people are the two main characters of epic poetry. Hero characters are people who represent the physical beauty, strength, intelligence and talent of the community. These people have extraordinary size, great appearance, and appear in the beauty of shaping according to the aesthetic point of view and the own standards of the community and that era. With the image of the people, they are usually a large number (we, the villagers, the servants, the Troia people, the Greek warriors... ) and play the role of background to honor the hero's beauty. Besides, there are also characters such as old people, wise characters, beautiful girls... They are the source, the foundation, the fulcrum, so that on that foundation, the hero realizes the noble ideal of the community.

### **3.1.2.4. Epic space and time**

The reality of epic poetry is the community life described on a large scale, from moral activities to customs and beliefs. The space of epic poetry is a large space and a long time because it is associated with the permanence of the nation's history.

For ancient epic poetry, time is the time of the absolute past, deeply receded into the past, but the consciousness of the people and the nation still have a close connection with the present life. It is still considered a glorious pride or a great historical lesson of the nation. In modern works with epic tendencies, space and time are always opened up endlessly with thousands of generations, thousands of years, and the future.

### **3.1.2.5. Epic language**

Hegel emphasized epic poetry's tone: powerful breath, calm presentation and natural tone, impersonal narrative that unfolds spontaneously in a wonderful order. And Pospelov said that epic poetry has a specific and unique linguistic system, unique stylistic features. There are strong exaggerations, extraordinary, giant words. In particular, the character language has its own type of monologue and dialogue, "long, unhurried, expository, manifesto-style speeches", emphasizing formality and apparent effectiveness.

Bakhtin believes that in epic poetry there is a system of images and words that are beautiful, splendid, glorious with extraordinary dimensions. The symbols of epic poetry are also often large in size: the wide sea, the high mountains, the long river, the sky...

Epic poetry often chooses exaggeration techniques that are suitable for describing people who are transcended to the level of the universe and gods. Besides, epic languages, especially ancient epics, often pay attention to descriptions of actions. Only modern epics have paid much attention to introspection. Epic lyrics are rich in praise, reverence, and pride. In the ancient epics, the method of delaying the epic time was an important measure, to be able to describe the customs, rituals, and life of the community, in accordance with the slow, leisurely rhythm of the

epic narrative style. But in revolutionary epic poetry, the epic language has a strong rhythm, fast and urgent speed of the words, suitable for the description of the speed of the times.

### **3.2. Requirements for developing epic reading comprehension for grade 10 students in Vietnam**

#### **3.2.1. In line with the teaching orientations of the general education program 2018**

The teaching orientation of the general education curriculum in Philology 2018 is the orientation of developing students' competencies. Accordingly, the teaching of epic reading comprehension also needs to ensure the following requirements:

Students are considered as subjects of reading comprehension activities, who are guided by teachers to explore and discover knowledge of Philology by themselves, not as passive recipients of available knowledge.

Teaching epic reading comprehension through organizing learning activities in students. In this process, the teacher is the person who designs and organizes students to conduct learning activities. The student is the recipient of the learning tasks assigned by the teacher and implements those tasks under the guidance and support of the teacher.

Methods of teaching epic reading comprehension are given great attention so that students can effectively read other texts of the type and length corresponding to the learned texts. This is the requirement for "extended reading" in the new Philology program.

The coordination of individual learning and cooperative learning is strengthened to help students to think more, work more, express themselves through more activities.

#### **3.2.2. Paying attention to the general and specific characteristics of the genre**

Unlike informational or argumentative texts, literary texts are types of texts with outstanding features of symbolism, multi-sense, expressiveness, and originality. Therefore, when organizing teaching reading comprehension of literary texts in general and epic poetry in particular, teachers must base on the above characteristics to guide students: reading comprehension of words, reading comprehension of images and reading comprehension of meaning.

Besides the common features, each genre of literary texts has its own characteristics. The specific characteristics of epic poetry have been clearly presented above. Therefore, in the process of teaching reading comprehension, teachers need to pay attention to the specific characteristics of epic poetry.

#### **3.2.3. Integrating into the process of teaching reading comprehension of epic poetry**

Integration is one of the requirements of teaching in the 2018 Philology program in Vietnam. Therefore, in teaching reading comprehension in general and teaching epic poetry in particular, teachers need to have the skills to combine good and accurate in-subject and interdisciplinary knowledge to guide students to acquire knowledge associated with an application to real life.

#### **3.2.4. Ensuring systematic and suitable for each specific lesson**

The main goal of teaching epic reading comprehension is to develop students' competence. Therefore, the teaching process needs to ensure a clear presentation of operations to guide readers to solve the given reading comprehension task. The reading comprehension takes

place in three stages: pre-reading, while reading and post-reading. At each of those stages, it is necessary to guide students in specific activities through the competence-oriented question/exercise system designed by the teacher.

### **3.3. Some measures to developing reading comprehension competence for grade 10 students in Vietnam in teaching epic poetry**

#### **3.3.1. Flexibly applying a number of reading comprehension strategies to develop students' reading comprehension competence of epic poetry**

In the process of reading comprehension of epic poetry, teachers need to be flexible in applying a number of reading comprehension strategies, such as marking and taking notes in the margins, text overview, note-taking, literary communication, general connection question, question-answer relationship, cognitive and metacognitive relationship, inferential reading, mind-movie, etc. In order for students to be able to use active, independent and self-organized reading strategies, teachers must be able to self-organize, read, and give them the opportunity to practice and regularly use these strategies. When using reading comprehension strategies, teachers can organize classes as individuals or groups depending on the content of the lesson.

#### **3.3.2. Using the reading comprehension question system towards competence development**

##### **3.3.2.1. Some types of reading comprehension questions at the pre-reading stage**

The pre-reading stage has the goal of eliciting background knowledge related to the main contents of the text; relating what students know to the text topic and building predictions. Teachers can use some of the following types of questions:

- Questions to determine reading purposes: This is an important question to help students choose appropriate reading strategies when receiving texts.
- Questions related to background knowledge: This type of question has the function of evoking, activating the knowledge, experiences and emotions of the reader related to the text they are about to read, creating a mood when receiving the text, including questions related to themselves, other texts, and the world.
- Predictive questions about the topic, theme, character, author, etc. in the epic work.

##### **3.3.2.2. Some types of reading comprehension questions at the while reading stage**

The while reading stage has the goal of clarifying and reviewing what happened, confirming and making new predictions, critical text evaluation and personal contact, comparing with the experiences of others. During this stage, teachers can use several types of questions, such as summary questions, prediction questions, inference questions, imaginary questions, etc.

##### **3.3.2.3. Some types of reading comprehension questions at the post-reading stage**

The post-reading phase has the goal of evaluating, criticizing and reflecting on the work. At this stage, the following types of questions can be used: checking the predictions, explaining the problems mentioned in the work, comparing different texts, evaluating the author's success and the meaning of the work.

#### **3.3.3. Strengthening the organization of experiential activities to develop students' reading comprehension competence of epic poetry**

Experiential activities can take place in the classroom when students are transformed

into, role-playing in each character of epic works to express their feelings, attitudes, and thoughts, and through questions and situations, they can clearly express their own thoughts and views. Teachers can use other forms such as retelling the epic by drawing illustrations. Depending on time conditions and facilities, teachers can be flexible to choose appropriate forms of experience.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

For most countries in the world, reading comprehension is one of the important contents in schools. Reading comprehension is considered a tool and teaching reading comprehension is to create a cultural foundation for readers. People who can read well are the ones who often find high-paying jobs or play an important role in enriching cultural and civilized life. Thanks to their good reading comprehension ability, they become citizens with good and useful lives. In order to achieve that result, teachers of Philology need to guide students to read well to understand types of texts, including epic poetry.

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