

# Reading as a component of moral education of students

## La lectura como un componente de la educación moral de los estudiantes

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### Abstract

The current study views reading as a component of moral education of students. Reading has the following functions: it serves as a tool for moralities formation; it is a practice facilitating socialization; it is one of the basic values to transfer from generation to generation. This paper presents the findings of a sociological survey with Russian university students as the target group. We analyze peculiar aspects of students' reading practices, including activity-oriented and axiological aspects. The study revealed common and peculiar reading trends.

**Key words:** moral education, reading, student community

### Resumen

En este artículo, la lectura se considera como un elemento de la educación espiritual y moral de los estudiantes. La lectura ejerce las siguientes funciones principales: es un instrumento para la formación de las cualidades morales de una persona; actúa como una práctica conducente a la socialización; es uno de los valores básicos que se pasan de generación a generación. Este artículo destaca los resultados del estudio sociológico realizado entre estudiantes de las universidades rusas. El autor analiza aspectos de las prácticas de lectura de los estudiantes, incluso los aspectos axiológicos y orientados a la actividad. El estudio ha revelado las características generales y distintivas de las prácticas de lectura.

**Palabras clave:** educación moral, la lectura, comunidad estudiantil.

## 1. Introduction

The Russian society at the current stage of its development experiences a number of socio-cultural transformations. Reappraisal of values not only makes it difficult to consolidate the population, but also prevents from establishing cross-generational continuity. The issues of moral education of young adults come to the fore. The focus is on formation of social behavior, social image, feelings and social position of modern students. Reading is one of efficient and widely applied educational techniques facilitating establishment and development of moral values. Reading indicates personal development, that is, maturity, intelligence, leadership potential; it

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fosters knowledge and skills critical to success in various fields, including routine problem-solving skills and professional expertise. Moreover, reading can be considered as an independent moral value that manifests itself through personal aspirations, interests, needs and ideals.

Generally, high school students become objects of numerous educational manipulations, while university students accomplish their own individual roles to a far greater degree, particularly, when making decisions about what books to read, how many hours to save for reading or even whether to read or not. In most cases, university study falls on rather a tough period of personal development when your primary socialization is over and you are at the start of your professional development; it is the time when you become aware of your full legal capacity and responsibilities as well as of a variety of options for self-development and self-actualization. It is the period when young adults still continue studies and yet gain their own social experience – both positive and negative one – by realizing their potential through various roles, namely, those of a citizen, a worker, a spouse and a parent. How will they manage to accomplish their goals in the future? What quality and meaningful content will their social experience acquire? Which values will they communicate? These are some of the questions that launch discussion on how reading impacts moral education of students being part of the entire educational system.

The purpose of the study is to investigate into reading practices of students basing on empirical evidence. Reading is viewed as part of the entire system of moral education. Apparently, the findings and conclusions of our study can be used by scientific and educational communities for interdisciplinary researches. It should be noted that moral development of young adults is rather a topical issue discussed in mono- and interdisciplinary researches that choose student community as the study object. Chaldyshkina N. N. and Loskutova R. R. specify the factors that restrain moral development of students. Firstly, the role of the family in shaping the moral image is weakening, secondly, values-based orientations are becoming less distinct or clear-cut due to media impact, thirdly, young adults have no strong ties to religion and put material valuables first, fourthly, community commitment is no longer in trend, and finally, social and psychological gap between lecturers and students is increasing (Chaldyshkina, Loskutova, 2014).

According to another study, reading makes a substantial contribution to the development of moral values and communication skills, continuity of knowledge and social attitudes, preservation of cultural and intellectual potential (Galaktionova, 2006). There is an independent research area within sociology – sociology of reading (Plotnikov, 1999). It considers reading as a social practice and researches how reading impacts moral development focusing on the nature and substance of readers' interests and demands (Vorontsov, 2009).

Sociology views reading as a multi-aspect phenomenon and the aspects in the spotlight are as follows: creativity, communication, applicability for socialization, axiological potential, tendency to cybernation, orientation towards social activity and social functioning (Stefanovskaia, 2007). The sociological survey carried out in Moscow universities in 2008 fixed the tendency towards diminution in reading practices as a result of the development of recreational infrastructure, on the one hand, and due to students' negative attitudes to reading, on another (Yumasheva, 2008).

Conversely, the research conducted in Chelyabinsk region in 2017 under the guidance of Khafizov D. M. records students' positive attitudes to reading. The respondents assessed reading as a significant and prestigious cognitive and aesthetic value (Khafizov, 2017). According to another sociological survey, students of Moscow technical universities tend to cut down on their demands for classical literature (Priadko, 2019).

Thus, reading as part of moral education of students is a topical issue to consider by both scholars and broad public. Furthermore, the analysis of the reading practice as a research object lays foundation for further modelling and forecasting various vital social processes, including transfer of moral values.

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## 2. Methodology

Reading as part of moral education has a direct impact on mindset and behavior formation. Reading finds its actualization “in the nature of ethnic awareness and in social practices” (Borodaeva, 2012, p. 25 ). Therefore, it is the activity-oriented character of reading that comes to the fore in a sociological analysis. The activity-oriented aspect manifests itself through particular actions of readers and indicates personal development. Consequently, researchers must not only enquire whether students read regularly or not, but also take into account students’ assessments of various parameters of their reading habits.

We can consider reading from the perspective of choices young adults make in favor of or against particular values and behavior patterns – with this approach reading is viewed as a values-based orientation (Borodaeva, 2012). Thus, it is relevant to expand empiric toolset by adding questions about axiological component of reading, one of them can be a question asking whether students are willing or reluctant to pay more attention to reading.

Some researchers view reading as “a cognitive and communication activity the purpose of which is interpreting a text and bringing its content into agreement with the needs of the reader as a social being” (Mironova, 2003, p. 48). Reading has a variety of functions, namely, those of cognition, information consumption, communication, a hedonistic function and that of moral and aesthetic education. Thus, another question to include in a sociological survey is the one about purposes of reading and their correlation. According to the survey conducted at universities of North Macedonia, the respondents highlight such purposes of reading as knowledge acquisition and satisfaction of personal needs and desires (Skenderi, Ejupi, 2017).

Another significant question to ask is how many hours a day, a week or a month students make for reading practices. Development of reading skills deserves particular attention and this is a challenging task not only at school age. Some findings of foreign researchers can serve as illustrative examples. A two-year research at colleges and universities in Andalusia confirmed direct correlation between the quality of text comprehension and emotional intelligence (Del Pilar Jiménez, Alarcón, de Vicente-Yague, 2019). The post-primary analysis of more than 4000 literacy tests (PISA) done by Flemish students detected links between text comprehension and enjoyment you take in reading (Rogiers, Van Keer, Merchie, 2020).

All the above assumptions taken as a whole and separately provide basis for further sociological survey and enable to compare new findings with those already obtained in other sociological and interdisciplinary researches. We carried out a major sociological study “Reading of fiction books by Russian students” using the interview method to obtain initial data. The research tools were developed by E. V. Kargapolova, Doctor of Sociology, Professor of Plekhanov Russian University of Economics. The first phase of the study started in February 2016, the second one took place in June 2019. During the first phase we surveyed students from Astrakhan (N=400) and Volgograd (N=400), at the second stage we surveyed young adults from Moscow (N=2100), Volgograd (N=460) and Astrakhan (N=400). The benchmarking survey didn’t aim at representative sampling; the findings can be applied only to the aggregate data of the survey or used as a reference source. Nevertheless, the obtained data not only provide large quantities of information to think over, but also enable to make valid conclusions. Data processing and analysis were performed using Vortex (2016 r.) and SPSS (2019 r.). This paper reviews the findings obtained during the second phase of the survey.

It is important to note that the second phase of the survey took place in three Russian cities that differ from one another by a number of criteria. Moscow is the capital of Russia, it is a rich and fast-developing city where there are a lot of universities, including those that are internationally recognized. Young people from across the country apply for Moscow universities. Volgograd is a city with more than 1000 000 inhabitants (according to the national census of 2010 there were just 15 cities with more than 1000 000 inhabitants). Volgograd is a big federal city where there are many universities that attract young people from other regions, mostly, the neighboring ones.

Astrakhan is relatively a big provincial city with more than 500 000 residents, it is the regional center with a few universities, some of which gained recognition at the federal level. The students of Astrakhan universities are mainly the native residents of the region.

### 3. Results

Table 1 presents the answers to the question “Which category of people do you belong to?” Out of the total number of respondents 43,2% enjoy reading fiction books; 27,7% read books only if they have no alternatives to spend their leisure time; 20,9% read in case they need it for some reason; 5,8% do not read fiction at all. The comparative analysis found out that Moscow residents who enjoy reading account for 53,5% out of the total number of respondents and it is the highest rate in three cities. The number of book lovers in Astrakhan is 39,3% and in Volgograd it is 36,3%.

**Table 1**  
Students’ answers to the question “Which category of people do you belong to?” (% of respondents)

Answers	Astrakhan	Volgograd	Moscow	Arithmetic average
I enjoy reading fiction books and I read with great pleasure	39,3	36,8	53,5	43,2
I read fiction only if I have no alternatives to spend my leisure time	32,0	28,4	22,6	27,7
I read fiction only if I need it for some reason	22,3	24,3	16,0	20,9
I don’t read fiction at all	5,1	7,5	4,7	5,8
Difficult to say	1,3	2,8	2,9	2,3
Deny answering	0,0	0,2	0,3	0,2

Source: original

Table 2 provides the answers to the question “How do you assess the amount of fiction books you read?” Every second Russian student answered: “I don’t read much but I’d like to read more” and this result is very significant for this study. Students take reading as a values-based orientation and this tendency is observed both in the aggregate data of the survey and in the data obtained in each of the three cities. The respondents not only assess their reading habits but also most of them speak out willingness to develop their reading skills. Every fourth respondent from Moscow and Volgograd chose the option “I don’t read much but this is enough for me”. 44,9% of the respondents from Astrakhan belong to the readers who do not read much but would like to make more time for reading; 23,7% of Astrakhan residents think they spend enough time on reading. Most of the respondents, who admit they read a lot, live and study in Moscow, the second largest number of people, who answer the same way, live in Astrakhan. Volgograd is behind with the rate almost twice as little as that in Moscow. Most of the students who say they do not read much live in Volgograd, the lowest corresponding rate accrues to Moscow students. Such trends can presumably result from busy and diverse lifestyles of the modern student community – in a daily routine reading gives way to activities from other life spheres. The same trends are typical of foreign students as well. For instance, the survey at Ankara University found out that students do read fiction in their leisure time, however, they cannot find much time for reading because of tough schedules and high-pressure curriculum, busy public life and other factors (Erdem, 2015).

**Table 2**  
Students' answers to the question "How do you assess the amount of fiction books you read?" (% of respondents)

Answers	Astrakhan	Volgograd	Moscow	Arithmetic average
I read a lot	10,7	7,7	16,0	11,5
I don't read much but it's enough for me	28,4	22,6	20,0	23,7
I don't read much but I'd like to read more	44,9	49,0	50,7	48,2
I read little	15,5	18,1	10,7	14,8
Difficult to say	0,5	2,1	2,3	1,6
Deny answering	0,0	0,4	0,3	0,2

Source: original

Table 3 presents the answers to the question about purposes and frequency of reading practices. Russian students prioritize purposes of reading this way: preparation for classes is number one in their list, information acquisition ranks second. Thus, information consumption is the main function of students' reading practices, which is mainly determined by the core activity of the target social group, that is, engagement in university studies. Books are conventional tools used for educational purposes (Kurschus, 2014); revising for tests and exams, doing research work – all this boosts readers' activity of students, both first-year ones and graduates (Mbhele, 2016; Mwageni, 2017). It should be noted that before the age of 24 reading takes up one-fifth of the total leisure time. Following this age, i.e. right after graduation from university, the number of hours saved for reading decreases dramatically as young adults prefer other ways to spend their leisure time – they are more likely to communicate with their families and friends, watch videos and listen to music (Chernova, 2013).

**Table 3**  
Students' answers to the question "What are the purposes of your reading and how often do you read?" (% of respondents)

Answers	Astrakhan	Volgograd	Moscow	Arithmetic average
For self-development and self-cognition				
Once a day or more often	15,2	15,5	24,3	18,3
Once a week	28,7	28,6	29,0	28,8
Once a month	28,7	22,2	23,7	24,9
Once in half a year	12,9	13,5	12,2	12,9
For preparation for classes				
Once a day or more often	32,7	25,8	27,0	28,5
Once a week	35,0	31,8	33,6	33,5
Once a month	19,3	18,9	18,6	18,9
Once in half a year	5,8	9,5	8,2	7,8
For information acquisition				
Once a day or more often	35,5	25,2	31,4	30,7
Once a week	28,9	28,4	28,3	28,5
Once a month	21,1	20,4	19,3	20,3
Once in half a year	5,3	9,0	8,3	7,5
For the world exploration				
Once a day or more often	18,0	14,0	18,9	17,0
Once a week	29,7	23,9	25,6	26,4
Once a month	23,9	23,0	23,4	23,4
Once in half a year	11,9	16,6	15,1	14,5
For leisure and entertainment				
Once a day or more often	21,6	20,4	27,8	23,3
Once a week	28,2	24,5	26,7	26,5
Once a month	24,6	23,7	24,1	24,1

Answers	Astrakhan	Volgograd	Moscow	Arithmetic average
Once in half a year	11,7	15,3	11,2	12,7
For self-education				
Once a day or more often	24,1	21,5	28,1	24,6
Once a week	29,7	26,2	31,7	29,2
Once a month	21,3	22,6	20,4	21,4
Once in half a year	10,9	15,3	10,4	12,2
For pleasure				
Once a day or more often	25,6	24,5	31,1	27,1
Once a week	24,9	23,4	27,0	25,1
Once a month	22,3	22,4	20,2	21,6
Once in half a year	12,4	12,0	10,1	11,5

Source: original

Self-education ranks third in the list of reading purposes, self-development and self-cognition share the fourth position. According to the survey, moral and educational functions of reading are in demand, which argues for efficiency of educational procedures used to form the adequate environment for personal development. Hedonistic and aesthetic functions of reading are not as much demanded by students. The number of those who read for pleasure on a daily or weekly basis is not as large. The least wanted is the cognitive function. Reading with the purpose to explore the outside world is practiced less frequently. More often for this purpose students use social nets and other web resources.

Notably, some age peculiarities must be taken into account when it comes to reading practices of young adults. Extensive empirical world exploration, relative financial literacy, professional identity – these are the factors that guide their activity. Reading study books takes up most of the time. Desire for new knowledge and readiness for experiments become the leading features with students. As you grow older your reading likings become finally shaped, and with it increases your demand for professional reading (Mironova, 2003). The findings about purposes and frequency of students' reading practices fix the same tendencies for separate cities and for the aggregate data of the survey. Nevertheless, the comparative analysis of the data obtained in different cities points towards a significant conclusion: the bigger the city is the more often and eagerly students read, i.e. Moscow students read more often than their Volgograd counterparts, the smallest number of young adults who enjoy reading live in Astrakhan.

#### 4. Conclusions

Reading is a significant component of moral education of students. The sociological survey provided substantial data for further thorough consideration of modern students' reading habits and practices. The survey took place in three Russian cities qualified as a capital city (Moscow), a city with more than 1000 000 inhabitants (Volgograd) and a provincial city (Astrakhan). The comparative analysis points towards some significant tendencies. Respondents from different cities share some common attitudes to reading. Most of the students exercise activity approach to reading – they enjoy reading and do read fiction works. When assessing the amount of books they read, respondents choose the option "I don't read much". However, most of the students specify that they "would like to read more". The main purposes of students' reading are preparation for classes and information acquisition. Self-education and self-development rank lower positions in the list of reading purposes. As to the frequency of reading, on average, university students read "once a day or more often" or "once a week". The characteristics of students' reading practices are mainly determined by their key activity, that is, educational process. The comparative analysis of the data from different Russian cities highlights some distinctions. The key rates of Moscow students exceed those of the aggregate data and the corresponding rates of Volgograd and Astrakhan students. As compared to Astrakhan respondents, students from Volgograd have lower rates of

axiological and activity-oriented components of reading. Frequency of reading practices correlates with the population size – Moscow residents read more often than young adults from provincial cities. The findings and conclusions presented in this paper have scientific potential and can serve as the basis for further studies in the area of reading practices. Moreover, university educators can make practical use of the survey data to form, develop and correct the approaches and procedures of moral education.

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