An Analysis of Secondary School English Language Course Bank Resources in the Sense of PISA Reading Skill Criteria

A.D. Dukenova[1]*, G.K. Ismagulova[2]
[1,2]L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University
Astana, Kazakhstan
*ainur.dukenova@alumni.nu.edu.kz

Abstract. This study aims to assess English language resources in secondary schools based on the reading skill criteria outlined by PISA. It offers insights into the alignment of these resources with PISA frameworks, focusing on cognitive processes to understand how these materials support or hinder higher-order thinking skills, which are essential for developing effective educational strategies. Document analysis was employed to evaluate materials from English language resources created by teachers at 21 secondary schools in Kazakhstan. The tasks and texts were analyzed by text format, genre, and the cognitive processes outlined in the PISA reading framework. The findings reveal that the most frequently used text format is continuous text, with instructional genres being predominant; narrative and explanatory texts were also included more often. Additionally, most tasks primarily focus on understanding and interpreting information, largely involving lower order thinking skills. Overall, the resources in secondary school English language courses do not align fully with PISA reading skills criteria. Consequently, it is recommended that additional training be provided for teachers to develop reading tasks and texts that adhere to PISA's cognitive domains.

Key words: reading skill, PISA framework, cognitive processes, analysis.

Introduction

Kazakhstan actively participates in international assessments to enhance its educational system. One key assessment is the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), which evaluates students' functional literacy—their ability to apply knowledge, skills, and competencies in Kazakhstan actively participates in international assessments to enhance its educational system. One key assessment is the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), which evaluates students' functional literacy—their ability to apply knowledge, skills, and competencies in real-life situations. This functional literacy includes scientific, mathematical, and reading literacy, with reading literacy being particularly essential for students' academic success.

In past assessments, Kazakhstani students showed strong performance in low-order thinking skills, such as remembering, recognizing, and retrieving information from continuous texts. However, they struggled with higher-order thinking skills, including reflecting on and evaluating texts, as well as dealing with non-continuous texts [1]. Additionally, challenges in locating and using information from multiple sources indicated difficulties in applying knowledge to real-life

contexts. These findings underscore the need for a focused examination of English language resources in secondary schools to align with the higher-order skills emphasized in the PISA framework.

Previous studies have primarily focused on how PISA, as an international assessment, has influenced the education system, policies, and reforms in Kazakhstan [2, 3]. Other areas of investigation include factors affecting students' performance [4, 5] and issues of inequality in education between rural and urban schools based on PISA [6]. However, despite the results showing Kazakhstani students' performance in reading literacy, there has been little attention paid to the materials and tasks that teachers use in their daily teaching practices.

This paper aims to assess the alignment of English language resources with PISA reading criteria by analyzing how these resources support or hinder higher-order thinking skills. The following research questions guided this research:

1. How well do secondary school English language resources align with PISA reading skills?

2. What types and formats of texts are emphasized in the resource bank?

Literature review

The OECD's International Programme for Student Assessment (PISA) serves as a monitoring tool for evaluating the educational outcomes of participating countries through the lens of student achievement within an internationally agreed framework [7]. It is anticipated that the development and administration of this internationally standardized assessment will provide empirically grounded data to inform policy decisions. PISA covers three domains as reading literacy, mathematical literacy, and scientific literacy of 15-year-old students of the members' countries of the OECD. This study is focused on one of its domains reading literacy. Reading literacy is the ability to comprehend, interpret, and critically engage with written texts in various contexts, enabling individu-

als to achieve personal goals, expand their knowledge, and actively participate in society [8]. Reading literacy now encompasses more than just decoding information; it also involves students' capacity to apply their previous knowledge, various processes, and strategies effectively and appropriately to different situations, text types, and tasks characteristics [8]. This study addresses such specific aspects of PISA reading literacy as types and formats of texts as well as tasks on cognitive demands which will be discussed further.

In PISA reading literacy is assessed across a range of scenarios, including both classroom-based texts and those texts encountered outside of students' classroom experiences and life contexts. The situational variables include reading for private use (personal), reading for public use, reading for work (occupational), and reading for education. The situation refers to the grouping of tasks based on how they are supposed to be used, the connections to other tasks, the overall topics they cover. For instance, reading a textbook can be associated with reading for education as the primary goal of it is to get information for academic purposes. Students do not have the opportunity to engage with a wide range of text types; therefore, teachers should ensure that their lessons include diverse texts.

Regarding text types, students should work on both continuous and non-continuous texts, as well as a combination of both – referred to as mixed texts. Continuous texts typically contain various markers that aid in recognizing the structure of the text, finding information, and understanding the main points more easily. Continuous text types include description, narration, exposition, argumentation, instruction, and hypertext. Non-continuous texts are classified based on their structure and format, including tables, lists, maps, certificates and other texts presented in a matrix format. The inclusion of various text types influences students' reading performance levels.

The task characteristics in PISA are structured to correspond with the reading objectives that students are expected to meet

[9]. Consequently, interacting with a text activates three key cognitive processes in students: locating information, comprehension, and evaluation and reflection. These cognitive processes differ in task difficulty, ranging from those requiring low-order thinking skills to those demanding higher-order thinking skills. Given that many students struggle with tasks involving evaluation and reflection, we aim to determine how much materials there designed to develop these higher cognitive demands.

Given the changing demands of economies and societies, it is recommended that governments focus not only on empowering teachers to develop and use a variety of texts, tasks involving higher order thinking skills to equip school students with complex skills as critical thinking, creativity and also socio-emotional skills to navigate these transformations effectively [10]. Key stakeholders of education could enhance students' reading performance in schools by helping them to read critically through evaluation, analysis and synthesis of the various types of texts and fulfilling reading items of various levels of cognitive demands carried out in the classrooms [11]. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate what help teachers need in designing items for developing reading skills of students in accordance with the levels of cognitive demands.

Methodology

The current study employs document analysis, a qualitative research method used to explore hidden textual information related to education or social science [12]. This method is utilized to examine materials shared and uploaded by secondary school teachers to assess their alignment with PISA reading skill criteria. In this research, various documents and materials are examined to determine how well they reflect the contents of the PISA framework followed by descriptive analysis. Qualitative method as a document analysis can be conducted at descriptive level [13] when researchers look for the explicit meaning in the data.

The research data were collected from the resource bank used by English language teachers during the 2023-2024 academic year. The resources pertain to a network of 21 secondary schools in Kazakhstan. These schools were selected due to their shared characteristics, policies, and the researcher's better access to them. Off all the materials, 125 materials belong to 5th grades, 104 to 6th grades, 139 to 7th grades, 102 to 8th grades, and 148 to 9th grades. In total, 619 materials constitute the research data. Demographic information about the teachers is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of teachers who developed the materials

Gender	Female	40
	Male	6
Age	21-30 years	15
	31-40 years	25
	41-50 years	10
Teaching experience	1-3 years	17
	4-10 years	25
	11-30 years	4
Level of education	Bachelor	34
	Master	11
	Doctor	1

As seen in Table 1, out of the total participants, 40 of English teachers were female and 6 were male. Of all English teachers, 15 of them are 21- 30, 25 are 4- 10 and 10 are 11-50 years old. As for teaching experience, 17 of English teachers have 1-3, 25 have 4-10 and 4 have 11-30 years of experience. In addition, 34 teachers have bachelor's degree, 11 have master's degree and 1 have doctor's degree.

Data analysis

In the current study, descriptive analysis was employed to identify patterns in the data and address the research questions [14]. The analysis begins with data interpretation, where themes are generated, and document analysis data are coded according to these themes. This approach allows for a comprehensive examination based on the PISA reading skill criteria, which include the cognitive domains of locating information, interpreting, evaluating, and reflecting. This framework specifically addresses the first research question. The present study aims to categorize tasks based on cognitive processes and proficiency levels. To analyze the second research question, texts were classified based on their formats (continuous, non-continuous, mixed) and their types (description, narration, exposition, argumentation, poetry, instruction, and transaction) as identified in PISA.

Although 619 tasks were analyzed based on cognitive processes and proficiency levels, only 508 texts were examined according to text format and type, as some texts contained multiple tasks or questions. Additionally, tasks related to grammar and vocabulary were excluded from the study because they are not part of PISA. After conducting a descriptive analysis of the data, the frequency of themes was calculated and presented in tables.

Table 2 Cognitive processes of the tasks/ items in English resource bank

№	Grade	Number of items	Locating information	Interpreting and inferring meaning	Reflecting and evaluating
1.	5	125	97	40	9
2.	6	104	84	26	4
3.	7	139	111	21	7
4.	8	102	60	34	8
5.	9	148	87	43	18

According to table 2, in the 5th and 6th grades, the majority of questions (97 and 84, respectively) center on locating information, with fewer items for interpreting and only some for evaluating and reflecting. By the 7th and 8th grades, interpreting and evaluating questions begin to increase slightly, indicating a gradual shift towards these reading subskills. This trend continues in the 9th grade, where a more balanced mix appears while locating information questions remain high (87), interpreting (43) and evaluating (18) questions are more prominent, reflecting a progression toward advanced comprehension and critical thinking tasks.

Findings/Discussion

This section covers findings concerning cognitive processes, text formats and text types of the questions used in secondary school English language resource bank. The results were presented in accordance with questions of the study together with tables. Findings that relate to the texts' format and types in English resource bank are shown in the table 3.

Table 3. Texts' format and types in English resource bank

№	Grade	Number of texts	Text type	Text format
1.	5	94	Continuous 86	Description 41
			Non-continuous 8	Narration 18
			Mixed 0	Exposition 5
				Argumentation 1
				Poetry 2
				Instruction 19
				Transaction 8
2.	6	85	Continuous 81	Description 14
			Non-continuous 4	Narration 54
			Mixed 0	Exposition 13
				Argumentation 0
				Poetry 2
				Instruction 2
				Transaction 0
3.	7	107	Continuous 104	Description 4
			Non-continuous 3	Narration 34
			Mixed 2	Exposition 21
				Argumentation 1
				Poetry 2
				Instruction 45
				Transaction 0
4	8	99	Continuous 86	Description 34
			Non-continuous 7	Narration 17
			Mixed 5	Exposition 16
				Argumentation 5
				Poetry 8
				Instruction 13
				Transaction 6
5	9	123	Continuous 102	Description 31
			Non-continuous 21	Narration 45
			Mixed 7	Exposition 10
				Argumentation 13
				Poetry 6
				Instruction 16
				Transaction 2

The data from the table - highlights a consistent trend in the types of texts used across grades in the resource bank. In terms of materials for 5th grade, there is a strong preference for continuous texts, with 86 continuous and only 8 non-continuous texts available. This pattern continues in the 6th grade, showing a similar distribution with 81 continuous texts compared to just 4 non-continuous texts. In the 7th and 8th grades, there is minimal variation, as continuous texts remain predominant. However, by the 9th grade, there is a noticeable shift, with an increase in non-continuous texts; specifically, 102 texts are continuous, while 21 are non-continuous. This shift suggests a gradual integration of non-continuous texts as students' progress.

The data for texts' format shows that in the 5th grade, description texts are the most commonly used format, with 41 instances, followed by narration and instruction texts at 18 and 19, respectively. Argumentative and poetic texts are used much less frequently, with only 1 and 2 texts, respectively. In the 6th grade, most texts are narrative, while descriptive and expository texts are used to a lesser extent. By the 7th grade, narrative texts continue to be the most frequently used format, whereas, in the 8th grade, descriptive texts dominate. In the 9th grade, however, there is a greater diversity in text formats, including an increase in texts for argumentation, poetry, instruction, and transaction. This suggests a broadening range of text types to support advanced reading skills and comprehension.

Conclusion

The study highlights the prevalence of specific text types and cognitive reading subskills. Consistent with prior research on assessment items in reading literacy, it confirms that most questions focus on the cognitive process of locating information, as seen in studies by Dilekçi and Çiçek [15] and Tuzlukaya [16]. While similar research has not been conducted in Kazakhstan, studies on other subjects' textbooks reveal a similar trend, where locating information tasks are predominant [17, 18]. Comparable findings

in Korean and Turkish textbooks [19] further support this trend. Notably, this study also found a moderate number of tasks centered on inferring meaning and interpreting information across all grades, while tasks involving reflection and evaluation remain limited, though they increase by the 9th grade.

This study found that questions in English language materials for grades 5 through 9 mainly focus on the cognitive processes of "locating information" and "interpreting information." In 8th-grade assessments, most questions were at the "locating information" level, while "evaluating and reflecting" questions increased from 8th to 9th grade, though they remained very few overall. Similarly, Tulegenov and Isaeva [17] observed that 8th-grade reading assessments mostly measured basic knowledge and language skills. The limited presence of "evaluating and reflecting" questions in secondary English materials suggests that students are rarely encouraged to assess the quality and reliability of a text. This lack of focus on higher-order skills may partly explain why, according to PISA results [1], Kazakhstani students have lower reading skills compared to students from the top five OECD countries, with only a small portion reaching advanced reading levels.

In examining questions for the transition to secondary education aligned with PISA's text format, previous studies in the Turkish context found continuous texts predominantly used [16]. In this study, however, English language resources also relied heavily on continuous texts. Specifically, there were only 12 non-continuous texts across grades 5 and 6, 3 non-continuous and 2 mixed texts in grade 7, 7 non-continuous and 5 mixed texts in grade 8, and a slight increase to 21 non-continuous and 7 mixed texts in grade 9. These findings suggest that the text formats in the English resource bank do not align with PISA's approach, which incorporates a variety of non-continuous and mixed texts, such as tables, diagrams, and charts, to assess reading literacy.

This study recommends further research to investigate alternative assessment methods used by secondary school teachers, specifi-

cally those aligned with PISA criteria, and to evaluate items across different proficiency levels (1a, 1b, 1c, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). A key limitation of this study is the non-permanent nature of the resources analyzed, as teaching materials are frequently updated, which may not fully capture the range of texts and items used in everyday practice. To address this, a longitudinal study could provide a more comprehensive view of assessment practices in Kazakhstani schools by tracking resource changes and usage over time.

This study offers valuable implications for both research and practice. For research, it adds to the limited literature on Kazakhstani students' reading skills and subskills, addressing a gap in this area. Practically, the findings highlight the need for supporting teachers in fostering higher-order thinking skills in students. This includes encouraging teachers to focus on developing these skills in reading, enhancing their professional development in designing effective reading tasks, and motivating students to actively engage in higher order thinking during lessons.

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Орта мектептегі ағылшын тілі банк ресурстарын PISA оқу дағдыларының критерийлері бойынша талдау

А.Д. Дукенова[1]*, Г.К. Исмагулова[2]
[1,2] Л.Н. Гумилев атындағы Еуразия ұлттық университеті
Астана қ., Қазақстан Республикасы

Аңдатпа. Бұл зерттеу PISA-да көрсетілген оқу дағдыларын бағалау критерийлері негізінде орта мектептердегі ағылшын ресурстарын талдауға бағытталған. Когнитивті үдерістерге баса назар аудара отырып, осы ресурстардың PISA стандарттарына сәйкестігі туралы түсінік береді.материалдар тиімді білім беру стратегияларын әзірлеу үшін қажет жоғары деңгейлі ойлау дағдыларын қаншалықты қолдайды немесе кедергі келтіреді. Қазақстанның 21 орта мектебінде мұғалімдер құрған ресурстар банкінің материалдарын зерттеу үшін құжаттарды талдау пайдаланылды. Тапсырмалар мен мәтіндер PISA жиектемесінде сипатталған мәтін форматтары, жанрлар және когнитивті оқу процестері бойынша талданды. Зерттеу нәтижелері ең көп қолданылатын мәтіндік формат бірыңғай мәтін екенін көрсетеді, баяндау және түсіндірме мәтіндер басым. Сонымен қатар, тапсырмалардың көпшілігі бірінші кезекте ақпаратты түсінуге және түсіндіруге бағытталған. Жалпы, орта мектептегі ағылшын тілі ресурстарының банкі оқу дағдылары бойынша PISA критерийлеріне толық сәйкес келмейді. Демек, PISA-ның танымдық салаларына сәйкес келетін оқу тапсырмалары мен мәтіндерді әзірлеу үшін мұғалімдерге қосымша дайындық жүргізу ұсынылады.

Кілтті сөздер: оқу дағдылары, PISA жиектемесі, когнитивтік үдерістер, талдау.

Анализ банка ресурсов английского языка средней школы согласно критериям PISA по навыкам чтения

А.Д. Дукенова[1]*, Г.К. Исмагулова[2]
[1,2]Евразийский Национальный университтет имени Л.Н. Гумилева
Астана, Республика Казахстан

Abstract. Это исследование направлено на анализ ресурсов английского языка в средних школах на основе критериев оценки навыков чтения, изложенных в PISA. Он дает представление о соответствии этих ресурсов стандартам PISA, уделяя

особое внимание когнитивным процессам, для понимания насколько материалы поддерживают или препятствуют развитию навыков мышления высокого порядка, что необходимо для разработки эффективных образовательных стратегий. Для оценки материалов из банка ресурсов, созданных учителями в 21 средних школах Казахстана, был использован анализ документов. Задания и тексты были проанализированы по форматам текстов, жанров и когнитивным процессам чтения, описанным в рамке PISA. Результаты исследования показывают, что наиболее часто используемым текстовым форматом является сплошной текст, при этом преобладают повествовательные и пояснительные тексты. Кроме того, большинство заданий в первую очередь направлены на понимание и интерпретацию информации. В целом, банк ресурсов английского языка в средней школе не в полной мере соответствует критериям PISA по навыкам чтения. Следовательно, рекомендуется провести дополнительную подготовку учителей для разработки заданий по чтению и текстов, соответствующих когнитивным областям PISA.