

SCIENTIFIC-THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO FORMING READING CULTURE IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

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Abstract

Reading culture - the sustained habit of reading coupled with the capacity for critical comprehension, aesthetic appreciation, and independent interpretive engagement - represents one of the most significant yet underexplored dimensions of primary education. While considerable scholarly attention has been directed toward reading literacy as a measurable outcome, the formation of reading culture as a dispositional orientation toward text has received comparatively less systematic theoretical treatment. This article synthesises key scientific-theoretical approaches to the cultivation of reading culture in primary school learners, drawing upon motivational, cognitive, socio-cultural, and reader-response frameworks. The study examines how phonics-based, whole-language, and balanced-literacy traditions conceptualise the emergence of genuine reading engagement beyond mere decoding proficiency

Keywords: Reading culture, primary education, reading literacy, motivational theory, whole-language approach, phonics-based instruction, reader-response theory, digital reading, Uzbekistan education reform, early childhood literacy, metacognitive reading strategies, transactional theory.

Introduction

The distinction between reading skill and reading culture is not merely terminological - it is epistemological. A child who can decode text fluently but never voluntarily picks up a book, never experiences the quiet pull of narrative, and never uses reading as a tool for self-understanding has mastered a technique without inhabiting a culture. This distinction, while intuitive, has proved surprisingly difficult to operationalise in educational research and policy, where the measurable - phonemic awareness, reading speed, comprehension accuracy - consistently displaces the meaningful: the love of reading, the cultivation of interpretive imagination, the development of a reading identity.

The urgency of the distinction has been amplified by two converging pressures. First, the global PISA reading literacy assessments, conducted triennially since 2000, have redirected educational reform discourse toward measurable reading outcomes while largely bracketing questions of affective and dispositional engagement with text. Second, the digital revolution has profoundly restructured the textual environment in which children develop - a restructuring that both threatens traditional reading culture and opens unprecedented possibilities for its reinvention. Primary education stands at the precise developmental intersection where both pressures are most acute: it is during ages six through ten that reading habits, attitudes, and



identities are, according to the weight of developmental research, most susceptible to formative influence.

This article addresses the theoretical landscape that undergirds pedagogical approaches to reading culture formation in primary education. It does not aim to be exhaustive but to be architecturally coherent: to map the principal theoretical traditions, clarify their underlying assumptions, assess their empirical credentials, and identify their implications for classroom practice. The article proceeds from foundational cognitive and motivational theories, through socio-cultural frameworks, to reader-response and transactional approaches, before addressing the particular challenges and affordances of the digital reading environment and the specific context of contemporary Uzbek primary education.

"The goal of reading instruction is not to create readers who can read, but to create readers who do read. The difference between these two formulations contains the whole of what we mean by reading culture." (Pennac D., *Better Than Life*, 1992; pedagogical interpretation by the author)

2. COGNITIVE FOUNDATIONS: FROM DECODING TO COMPREHENSION TO MEANING-MAKING.

2.1. The Simple View of Reading and Its Limitations

The Simple View of Reading, formulated by Gough and Tunmer (1986), remains the most influential cognitive model in primary literacy instruction. In its canonical form, it proposes that reading comprehension is the product of decoding ability and linguistic comprehension: $RC = D \times LC$. The elegance of this formulation has made it enormously productive for structuring phonics instruction and diagnosing reading difficulties. However, as a theory of reading culture formation, the Simple View is, as its name suggests, too simple. It describes the necessary cognitive architecture for reading but says nothing about the disposition to read, the affective engagement with text, or the interpretive agency that characterises a genuine reader. A child may have high scores on both D and LC and yet experience reading as an obligation rather than an invitation.

The theoretical gap left by the Simple View has been partially addressed by Scarborough's Reading Rope model (2001), which reconceptualises the components of skilled reading as two intertwining strands - word recognition and language comprehension - whose increasing automaticity and integration produces fluent, strategic reading. More importantly for present purposes, the Reading Rope implicitly acknowledges that the integration of these strands requires not only cognitive capacity but motivational investment: without the reader's willingness to sustain the attentional effort required by complex text, the strands remain separate. This motivational dimension is precisely where cognitive models of reading intersect with the theoretical frameworks more directly concerned with reading culture.

2.2. Metacognitive Strategies and the Self-Regulated Reader

A crucial bridge between cognitive competence and reading culture is provided by research on metacognitive reading strategies. Flavell's foundational work on metacognition (1979) established that effective learners monitor and regulate their own cognitive processes; Palincsar and Brown's reciprocal teaching studies (1984) demonstrated that explicit instruction in four



metacognitive strategies - summarising, questioning, clarifying, and predicting - significantly improved both comprehension and reading engagement in elementary learners. The pedagogical significance of this line of research for reading culture formation lies in its implicit reconceptualisation of the learner: the metacognitive reader is not a passive recipient of textual meaning but an active agent who dialogues with text, monitors understanding, and strategically adjusts approach.

This agentic reconceptualisation has been elaborated by Zimmerman and Schunk's self-regulated learning framework (2001), which identifies three phases of effective engagement - forethought, performance, and self-reflection - and emphasises the role of self-efficacy beliefs in sustaining reading effort. For reading culture formation, the implication is significant: children who believe they are capable readers are more likely to choose reading voluntarily, persist through difficult texts, and develop the habitual engagement that constitutes reading culture. This suggests that metacognitive instruction serves a dual purpose - improving comprehension in the short term and building reading identity in the longer term.

3. MOTIVATIONAL FRAMEWORKS: INTRINSIC ENGAGEMENT AND READING IDENTITY

3.1. Self-Determination Theory Applied to Reading.

Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed from the 1970s onward and synthesised in their 1985 monograph, offers perhaps the most theoretically robust framework for understanding reading motivation in primary school children. SDT distinguishes between intrinsic motivation - engaging in an activity for its own inherent satisfaction - and various forms of extrinsic motivation, and crucially demonstrates that not all external regulation is equally destructive to intrinsic interest. The theory identifies three basic psychological needs - autonomy (self-determination), competence (effectiveness), and relatedness (connection to others) - whose satisfaction in any learning context predicts the development of intrinsic motivation for the associated activity.

Applied to reading culture formation, SDT generates several concrete pedagogical implications. Autonomy support - allowing children to choose their own reading materials, self-select reading times, and direct their own interpretive response - is consistently associated with higher intrinsic reading motivation (Gambrell, 2011). Competence support - calibrating text difficulty to children's developing abilities and providing timely, informative feedback - protects against the learned helplessness that is among the most reliable killers of reading culture. Relatedness support - reading aloud together, sharing responses in book clubs, connecting texts to children's social worlds - positions reading as a culturally valued communal activity rather than an isolated academic exercise. The convergence of these three conditions in the primary classroom creates what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) called a flow experience: the state of absorbed, effortless engagement that is phenomenologically indistinguishable from what we colloquially call a love of reading.

3.2. Reading Identity and the Concept of the “Reader Self”

A significant recent development in reading motivation research has been the elaboration of the concept of reading identity - the degree to which a child incorporates being a reader into



their self-concept. Moje and Luke (2009) argued that reading is not merely a cognitive skill but a social identity practice: to read is not only to decode and comprehend but to position oneself in relation to cultural communities defined by their relationship to texts. Children who identify as readers - who see reading as a constitutive part of who they are, not merely something they do at school - demonstrate substantially higher levels of voluntary reading engagement, persistence through difficult texts, and book selection diversity (Morgan and Fuchs, 2007).

The formation of reader identity in primary school is not a passive developmental process but an active pedagogical project. Research by Roser and Keehn (2002) and others has demonstrated that teachers who share their own reading lives with students, who treat texts as objects of genuine aesthetic and intellectual interest rather than comprehension exercises, and who create classroom environments saturated with books and reading talk, measurably shift children's self-perceptions as readers. The implication is that reading culture formation requires teachers who are themselves readers in the full cultural sense - not merely technically proficient, but genuinely invested in the life of texts. This is a demand not only on teacher training but on the institutional culture of schools.

4. SOCIO-CULTURAL APPROACHES: READING AS SOCIAL PRACTICE.

4.1. Vygotskian Perspectives on Literacy Development.

Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (1978) reframes reading development as fundamentally social before it becomes individual: children first encounter reading as a culturally mediated activity - books read aloud by caregivers, stories shared in community, texts inscribed in the material environment - before internalising reading as a private cognitive capacity. This sequence has profound implications for reading culture formation: it suggests that the affective and dispositional dimensions of reading are not added on top of cognitive competence but are foundational to it. Children who grow up in environments rich in what Heath (1983) called literacy events - instances of shared engagement with written language - develop not only stronger reading skills but fundamentally different orientations toward text as a meaningful cultural object.

The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development has been applied to reading culture formation through the practice of scaffolded shared reading - the teacher reading aloud to students texts slightly beyond their independent reading capacity while supporting comprehension and modelling interpretive engagement. The pedagogical power of read-aloud extends beyond vocabulary development and comprehension: it introduces children to the aesthetic experience of text, demonstrates that reading can be a source of pleasure and meaning, and creates a shared cultural reference world that Hirsch (1987) identified as essential to full cultural participation. In the primary years, before children have sufficient independent reading capacity to access this aesthetic dimension themselves, the teacher's read-aloud is the primary vehicle for the cultivation of genuine reading culture.

4.2. New Literacy Studies and Multiliteracies

The New Literacy Studies tradition, associated with scholars such as Street (1984), Barton and Hamilton (1998), and the New London Group (1996), challenged the autonomous model of literacy - the view that literacy is a single, neutral, context-free skill - with an ideological model



that reconceptualises literacy as multiple, situated, and socially constituted. This tradition has significant implications for reading culture formation in diverse educational contexts. It reminds us that children arrive at school not as literacy novices but as already competent participants in the literacy practices of their homes and communities - practices that may differ substantially from the print-centred, formal literacy of school.

For Uzbekistan's primary educators, the New Literacy Studies perspective raises important questions about the relationship between home literacy practices - which may include oral storytelling traditions, Qur'anic reading practices, and the rich repertoire of folk literary culture discussed by ethnopedagogical research - and school-based reading culture. The risk of a narrow conception of reading culture that privileges certain textual forms and practices over others is that it alienates children whose literacy lives are rich but differently organised. A pedagogically productive conception of reading culture must be expansive enough to honour diverse literacy heritages while also expanding children's access to the full range of textual forms - including canonical literary texts - that constitute cultural participation in the contemporary world.

5. READER-RESPONSE AND TRANSACTIONAL THEORIES: THE AESTHETIC DIMENSION

Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading (1978, 1995) represents the most theoretically sophisticated account of the aesthetic dimension of reading and its pedagogical implications. Rosenblatt proposed that reading is not a transmission of fixed textual meaning from author to reader but a transaction - a two-directional event in which both text and reader contribute to the creation of meaning. Crucially, she distinguished between two stances readers adopt toward text: the efferent stance, in which attention is directed toward information to be extracted and retained after reading; and the aesthetic stance, in which attention is directed toward the lived-through experience of reading itself - the images, feelings, associations, and thoughts evoked during the encounter with the text.

Rosenblatt's distinction has profound implications for reading culture formation. The school's persistent privileging of the efferent stance - comprehension questions, information extraction, summative assessment - may actively undermine the development of aesthetic reading engagement. Children who consistently encounter text in the efferent mode learn that reading is primarily an information-retrieval exercise, not a meaning-making experience. Rosenblatt's transactional theory argues that the cultivation of aesthetic reading - through open-ended response activities, creative engagements with text, and classroom discussions that honour the personal and emotional dimensions of reading experience - is not a pedagogical luxury but a prerequisite for the formation of genuine reading culture.

“A poem, a novel, a play remains merely inkmarks on a page until a reader transforms them into a literary work. Without the reader's participation, there is no literary event, no aesthetic experience, no reading culture”. (Rosenblatt L.M., *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*, 1978; pedagogical interpretation by the author).

The practical application of transactional theory in primary classrooms has been developed through literature-based approaches (Zarillo, 1989), reading workshop models (Atwell, 1987; Calkins, 2001), and literature circles or book clubs (Daniels, 1994). These approaches share a



commitment to positioning children as genuine respondents to texts - as readers whose interpretive experience matters - rather than as students whose job is to correctly identify the author's intention or answer pre-formulated comprehension questions. Research on these approaches consistently demonstrates their effectiveness in developing both reading comprehension and reading motivation, suggesting that the aesthetic and cognitive dimensions of reading are not in competition but mutually reinforcing.

6. DIGITAL READING ENVIRONMENTS: CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY FOR READING CULTURE.

The emergence of digital reading environments has introduced both unprecedented challenges and significant new possibilities for reading culture formation in primary education. The challenges are well-documented: research by Wolf (2018), Mangen and colleagues (2013), and others has identified that shallow, hyperlinked digital reading - the dominant mode of screen-based engagement - is associated with reduced sustained attention, lower inferential comprehension, and decreased aesthetic engagement compared with linear print reading. The neurological mechanisms proposed by Wolf - that deep reading requires specific neural circuits that develop through repeated engagement with sustained linear text and may be disrupted by the habitual fragmentation of digital reading - suggest that the uncritical introduction of digital devices into early reading instruction may inadvertently undermine the neurological foundations of reading culture.

However, the relationship between digital environments and reading culture is not simply adversarial. Leu and colleagues (2013) have argued for the concept of new literacies - the reading and writing skills required for effective participation in digital information environments - as genuinely distinct from and complementary to print-based literacy. Digital platforms have demonstrated measurable effectiveness in motivating reluctant primary readers through interactive features, personalised reading pathways, and immediate feedback (Bus, Takacs, and Kegel, 2015). E-books with embedded multimedia have shown particular promise for vocabulary development and comprehension in young readers. And digital platforms enable new forms of social reading - shared annotation, online book communities, author interactions - that extend the relational dimensions of reading culture into new spaces.

The pedagogical task, in light of this evidence, is not to choose between print and digital but to develop what Mangen (2008) called a reading ecology: a structured, intentional balance of reading experiences across different media and modalities, each contributing distinctive affordances to the developing reader's repertoire. For primary education, this ecology should be weighted toward sustained linear reading of high-quality print texts during the formative years of reading identity development, while thoughtfully integrating digital reading experiences that leverage their distinctive motivational and social affordances. The development of this reading ecology is both a curriculum design challenge and a teacher professional development priority.



7. READING CULTURE FORMATION IN UZBEKISTAN'S PRIMARY EDUCATION: CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS.

Uzbekistan's participation in PISA 2022 - the country's first engagement with the international assessment - produced reading results that significantly trailed OECD averages: a score of 380 against the OECD mean of 476, situating Uzbekistan among the lower-performing participants. These results have catalysed policy attention to reading development, but the risk is that policy response will narrow toward measurable reading skills at the expense of the broader formation of reading culture. International evidence strongly suggests that the two are not in tension: children who develop genuine reading engagement consistently outperform those who receive only skills-based instruction on precisely the comprehension and inference measures that standardised assessments privilege.

Uzbekistan possesses distinctive cultural resources that, if mobilised by pedagogically informed approaches, could powerfully support reading culture formation in primary schools. The rich tradition of oral literary culture - dostons, maqols, topishmoqs, and the folk narrative heritage documented by ethnopedagogical research - provides an indigenous foundation for the aesthetic engagement with language and story that Rosenblatt's transactional theory identifies as central to genuine reading culture. The challenge is to build bridges between this oral literary heritage and the habits of sustained print engagement that characterise reading culture in literate societies, without positioning either as superior to the other. The New Literacy Studies framework, with its insistence on the legitimacy of diverse literacy practices, provides a productive theoretical basis for this bridge-building.

The otinoyilar tradition - in which learned women transmitted literary and religious texts through informal community instruction - represents a historically grounded model of reading as a social, relational, and culturally embedded practice that resonates strongly with contemporary research on reading culture formation. Contemporary primary teachers can draw on this tradition not as a nostalgic reference but as evidence of a deep cultural valorisation of textual engagement that can be activated and extended in the formal educational context. Similarly, the classical Uzbek literary heritage - Navoi, Munis, Uvaysiy - provides primary educators with texts of genuine aesthetic quality that connect children to their own literary tradition while developing the aesthetic reading capacities that Rosenblatt's theory positions as central to reading culture.

8. AN INTEGRATIVE MODEL: THE TRIADIC ECOLOGY OF READING CULTURE FORMATION.

Drawing on the theoretical frameworks examined in the preceding sections, this article proposes an integrative model of reading culture formation in primary education organised around three interacting dimensions: text quality, instructional environment, and learner agency. These three dimensions form a triadic ecology in which each element both supports and is shaped by the others, and in which the absence or weakness of any single element limits the developmental potential of the whole.

Text quality encompasses both literary merit and motivational appeal, and the research reviewed here strongly suggests that these are not in tension. Children develop genuine reading culture through sustained engagement with texts that offer aesthetic experience, emotional



resonance, intellectual challenge, and cultural connection. A primary reading curriculum that prioritises decodable texts for their phonics regularity at the expense of their literary quality, or that offers only contemporary popular texts while excluding classical literary heritage, fails to develop the full dimensionality of reading culture. The triadic model argues for deliberate text curation that balances accessibility with challenge, contemporary relevance with literary depth, and global reach with local cultural rootedness.

Instructional environment encompasses the physical, social, and pedagogical conditions in which primary reading develops. The research base reviewed here converges on several environmental conditions consistently associated with reading culture formation: classrooms rich in books and reading materials; teachers who model genuine reading engagement; instructional approaches that honour aesthetic response alongside efferent comprehension; reading communities - book clubs, literature circles, reading aloud partnerships - that position reading as a socially valued activity; and assessment practices that value reading engagement and identity alongside measurable skill outcomes. Crucially, the instructional environment must actively negotiate the tension between the two roles of primary reading instruction - teaching the skill and cultivating the disposition - rather than allowing the more easily measured to displace the more important.

Learner agency occupies the third vertex of the triadic model and is the dimension most consistently underweighted in policy and curriculum discussions. The research on reading motivation, reading identity, and self-regulated reading reviewed in this article converges on a single central finding: children who experience genuine agency in their reading lives - who choose their books, determine their own reading pace, bring their own interpretive frameworks to texts, and share their reading responses in conditions of genuine dialogue - develop stronger reading cultures than those whose reading is entirely directed, assessed, and controlled by external authority. The cultivation of reading agency is not a pedagogical indulgence but a developmental necessity: it is the mechanism through which reading moves from a school activity to a life practice.

9. CONCLUSION

This article has mapped the principal scientific-theoretical frameworks for understanding reading culture formation in primary education. The cognitive frameworks - from the Simple View through metacognitive strategy research - establish the necessary but insufficient conditions for reading culture: they account for the reader's capacity to engage with text but not for the disposition to do so. The motivational frameworks - Self-Determination Theory and reading identity research - provide the bridge between competence and culture, identifying the psychological mechanisms through which skilled reading becomes habitual reading. The socio-cultural frameworks - Vygotskian theory and New Literacy Studies - situate reading culture formation in its broader social and cultural ecology, insisting that reading is a social practice before it is an individual competence. The reader-response and transactional frameworks - above all Rosenblatt's - recover the aesthetic dimension that purely cognitive and motivational accounts tend to flatten, arguing that the cultivation of aesthetic reading experience is not supplementary to reading culture but constitutive of it.



For Uzbekistan's primary educators and education policy makers, these theoretical frameworks collectively suggest a vision of reading culture formation that is simultaneously ambitious and practically grounded. It is ambitious in insisting that the goal of primary reading instruction is not merely functional literacy - the ability to decode and comprehend - but the formation of readers in the fullest sense: people who read because reading has become a constitutive part of how they understand themselves and engage with the world. It is practically grounded in the rich indigenous resources - the oral literary tradition, the classical literary heritage, the culturally embedded practices of communal textual engagement - that Uzbekistan's primary educators can mobilise in the service of this ambitious goal. The challenge, as always in education, is to translate theoretical insight into the lived reality of classrooms, teachers, and children - a translation that requires not only pedagogical expertise but genuine reading culture on the part of teachers themselves.

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