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INTEGRATED STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING WRITING AND READING IN UZBEKISTAN'S CLASSROOMS AND BEYOND

Alisher Rustamov Abduhakimovich
A teacher at the Department of English Language Teaching Methodology
in Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages. alisherus2@gmail.com
Dilshoda Burxonova Sherquzi kizi
A student of 2517 evening group
Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

Annotation: This article explores the paradigm shift from isolated to integrated reading and writing instruction, a pedagogical imperative supported by global cognitive research. It situates this shift within the unique and dynamic context of Central Asian education, with a focused lens on Uzbekistan's ongoing "Third Renaissance" reforms. The piece contrasts traditional, Soviet-influenced methodologies with modern competency-based approaches, emphasizing the cultural and structural considerations specific to the region. Moving beyond theory, it provides humanized, practical strategies for high school educators, framing the integrated literacy classroom as a space for diagnostic growth, cultural affirmation, and the development of a genuine, functional voice in students.

Keywords: Integrated Literacy, Reading-Writing Reciprocity, Pedagogical Diagnostics, Competency-Based Education (CBE), Uzbek Education Reform, Grammar-Translation Method, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Mentor Text, Cultural Rhetoric, Scaffolding.

Introduction: Beyond Silos in a Connected World

Imagine a young student in Samarkand, tasked with writing an essay in English about the Aral Sea ecological crisis. She has a wealth of feeling and inherited knowledge about this tragedy that touches her homeland. Yet, too often, her pen stalls. The problem is rarely a lack of concern or intelligence, but a fractured literacy experience. For decades, in Uzbekistan and much of the post-Soviet sphere, reading and writing have been taught as separate kingdoms, governed by different rules. Reading was a decoding exercise, a hunt for grammatical patterns and translatable content. Writing was an act of solitary reproduction, a demonstration of memorized rules, often disconnected from authentic purpose or audience.

Globally, this siloed approach has been dismantled by a quiet revolution in our understanding of the mind. Researchers like Steve Graham and Michael Hebert have compellingly argued that reading and writing are "two sides of the same coin," drawing from and strengthening a shared cognitive foundation (Graham & Hebert, 2010). To read deeply is to apprentice under a writer; to write effectively is to internalize the architectures of texts one has read. This integrated model isn't just a pedagogical preference—it's a cognitive necessity for deep learning.

Nowhere is the tension and promise of this integration more palpable than in contemporary Uzbekistan. As the nation pursues its ambitious "Third Renaissance," a vision predicated on educational modernization and global integration, its classrooms have become living laboratories of change. The system is oscillating between the deep-seated traditions of scholars like Jamol Jalolov, who codified the rigorous Grammar-Translation method, and the influx of Competency-Based Education (CBE) frameworks supported by international partners (Jalolov, 2012; British Council, 2021). This article delves into this complex landscape, arguing that for Uzbekistan to achieve its renaissance, it must strategically weave together the separate strands of reading and

writing into a single, strong "literacy rope." We will explore the global theory, the local reality, and, most importantly, offer humanized pathways forward for the teacher in a bustling Tashkent high school or a resourceful rural classroom.

The Global Theory: Why Integration Isn't Just Convenient, It's Cognitive

The historical separation of reading and writing was more a concession to school timetables than a reflection of how the brain learns. Modern literacy theory posits a reciprocal relationship, most eloquently visualized by Hollis Scarborough's "Reading Rope" and later adapted into the "Writing Rope" by Joan Sedita. These models show literacy as a braid of intertwined strands. For reading, these include *word recognition* (decoding) and *language comprehension* (background knowledge, vocabulary). For writing, they encompass *critical thinking* (idea generation), *syntax*, *text structure*, and *transcription* (spelling, handwriting) (Scarborough, 2001; Sedita, 2019).

The power of integration lies in connecting these ropes. The "background knowledge" strand of reading is fed directly by the "gathering information" process in writing. The "text structure" strand is virtually identical in both. When a student analyzes the argumentative flow of an article about climate change (reading), they are simultaneously building a mental template for structuring their own persuasive essay (writing). This is the essence of Graham's Shared Knowledge Theory—both skills tap a common reservoir of knowledge about language, genre, and communication (Graham, 2019).

Furthermore, Rhetorical Relations Theory reframes literacy as a dialogic act. A reader asks, "Who is speaking and why?" A writer asks, "Who is listening, and what do they need?" Teaching these questions together fosters crucial audience awareness. Finally, the Functional Theory reminds us that outside school walls, literacy tasks are rarely pure. We read a technical manual to write a safety report; we read colleagues' emails to craft our replies. Integrated instruction, therefore, bridges the often-artificial gap between the classroom and the real-world cognitive demands students will face in university and the workforce.

The Central Asian Crucible: Uzbekistan Between Legacy and Reform

Applying this integrated theory requires navigating Uzbekistan's unique educational terrain, marked by profound, simultaneous structural and philosophical shifts.

Structural Fluidity: Since independence, Uzbekistan has grappled with its schooling model, shifting from a Soviet-style 11-year system to a unique "9+3" model (9 years general school + 3 years specialized lyceum or college), and back to an 11-year general system in 2017. Today, discourse points toward a future 12-year model to align with international standards (AACRAO, 2025). Each shift sends ripples through the curriculum. The reintegration of grades 10-11 into general schools, for instance, placed the burden of advanced, pre-university literacy instruction onto teachers who may lack the specialized training of the former academic lyceums.

The Vocational Renaissance: While mandatory vocational college was phased out, the need for skilled labor has spurred a quality-focused revival of Technical Colleges (*Technicums*), championing **Dual Education** models adapted from Germany (GIZ, 2023). In these settings, literacy is unabashedly functional. The integration of reading technical manuals and writing precise safety logs or production reports is not an academic exercise—it is a workplace safety and efficiency imperative.

The English-Language Imperative: Central to modernization is the "English Speaking Nation" initiative, aiming for mass proficiency to boost global competitiveness. While policy mandates communicative, integrated methods, the classroom reality is often a hybrid. Many teachers, products of the very system they are now asked to transform, expertly navigate grammar rules but may struggle to facilitate the messy, interactive process of integrated reading and writing workshops (U.S. Embassy Tashkent, 2024).

The Cultural- rhetorical Bridge: Beyond policy lies the subtle layer of culture. Uzbek communication styles often value indirectness, narrative circularity, and high-context reference, deeply influenced by norms of *hormat* (respect). Anglo-American academic writing, conversely, often prizes linear argumentation, explicit thesis statements, and low-context clarity. An Uzbek student's essay might be labeled "unfocused" by a Western rubric when it is, in fact, skillfully employing L1 rhetorical patterns. Effective integration, therefore, must be cross-cultural, explicitly comparing textual "shapes" and validating the student's native rhetorical intelligence while scaffolding the new code.

From Red Pen to Diagnostic Compass: Humanizing Assessment

A pivotal innovation in this journey is the shift from punitive error-hunting to **Pedagogical Diagnostics**, a approach championed by Uzbek researchers like Alisher Rustamov (Rustamov, 2025). In a system dominated by high-stakes university entrance exams, writing can become mere test prep. Diagnostics reframes assessment as a learning tool, viewing errors not as failures but as insights into the learner's developing "interlanguage."

Instead of bleeding a paper with red ink, a teacher might use a simple diagnostic code in the margin: **ART** for an article error (the perennial challenge for Uzbek speakers, as their language lacks "a/an/the"), **WO** for word order (mapping Uzbek's Subject-Object-Verb structure to English's SVO), or **PREP** for preposition trouble. The student's task is then to decipher the code and self-correct, engaging in "self-repair" that strengthens cognitive pathways. This transforms the student from a passive recipient of judgment into an active editor and problem-solver. Coupled with analytic rubrics and peer feedback loops—essential in large classes of 35-45 students—this diagnostic approach humanizes the learning process, building confidence alongside competence.

Weaving the Rope in Practice: Classroom Narratives

Theory and diagnostics come alive in practice. Here are two humanized strategies for the Uzbek high school classroom:

1. The Mentor Text Journey: From the Aral Sea to a Student's Voice

- **Context:** Grade 10, Geography or English.
- **The Human Hook:** Start with a local heartbeat—the Aral Sea. The emotional resonance is immediate.
- **Integrated Narrative:**
  - **Phase 1: Reading as Architects.** Provide a "mentor text"—a compelling op-ed or NGO report on the crisis. But students aren't just reading *for* information; they're reading *like* writers. With highlighters, they deconstruct its architecture: yellow for the thesis, green for evidence, blue for transitional logic. They are building their Shared Knowledge bank.
  - **Phase 2: Writing to Learn.** In a double-entry journal, students copy a powerful quote on the left and write their reaction on the right: "This statistic shocks me because my grandfather tells stories of the fishing boats…" This validates their voice and personal connection.
  - **Phase 3: Learning to Write.** Now, they write their own piece on a local environmental issue—perhaps water conservation in Fergana or dust storms in Bukhara. The scaffold is explicit: "Use the *same* structure as our mentor. If it opened with a personal story, you open with a personal story." The anxiety of the blank page recedes, replaced by the confidence of guided craftsmanship.

2. The Silk Road Caravan Log: Narrative Empathy Across Time

- **Context:** Grade 11, History or English.

- **The Human Hook:** Invite students to step into the shoes of a 14th-century traveler on the Silk Road—a merchant from their own region.
- **Integrated Narrative:**
  - **Phase 1: Immersive Input.** Provide a "text set": maps, lists of traded goods (silks, spices, paper), descriptions of Bukhara's caravanserais, and a fictional traveler's diary excerpt. Reading is multi-modal and sensory.
  - **Phase 2: The Integrated Task.** Students write a three-day "Caravan Log." Day 1: Describe leaving home (descriptive adjectives). Day 2: Chronicle a challenge—a sandstorm, a wary encounter (narrative sequencing words: *suddenly, then, finally*). Day 3: Describe arrival at a caravanserai, employing cultural vocabulary (*choyhona, mehmondo'stlik*—hospitality).
  - **Phase 3: Digital or Analog Sharing.** If possible, they record an audio "podcast" entry. If not, they read entries aloud in small "caravan groups." Peers then write a brief response as a merchant in the next city. The loop of reading, writing, listening, and speaking is seamlessly closed.

Cultivating Writers: Methods for High School Students

Moving beyond specific lessons, here are foundational approaches to cultivate writing in integrated classrooms:

1. **Process Writing, Not Product Policing:** Abandon the "one-and-done" essay. Embrace brainstorming, drafting, peer review (using those diagnostic checklists), revision, and publication. Frame revision not as punishment for error, but as the essential work of a serious writer.
2. **Low-Stakes Practice:** Before the high-stakes essay, build fluency with daily, ungraded "writing to learn" tasks: one-minute summaries of a reading, prediction paragraphs, connection journals. This lowers affective filters, especially important in cultures where public error may cause shame.
3. **Sentence Combining:** Directly target syntactic fluency—a common hurdle. Provide simple kernel sentences related to a reading ("The Aral Sea shrank. The water was diverted. The economy collapsed.") and teach tools to combine them into sophisticated structures ("After the diversion of its water, the Aral Sea shrank, triggering economic collapse.").
4. **Genre-Based Pedagogy:** Explicitly teach the "recipes" of different text types—argument, narrative, report—using mentor texts as models. Make the invisible features of each genre visible through deconstruction.
5. **Connecting to Cultural Identity:** Use local literature, proverbs (*maqol*), and historical texts as reading material and prompts for writing. Ask students to compare a universal theme in a Uzbek folk tale and a Western short story. This honors their heritage as a legitimate source of academic knowledge.

Conclusion: Toward a Literate and Human Renaissance

The journey toward integrated literacy in Uzbekistan is more than a methodological upgrade; it is a cultural recalibration. It requires patience with teachers who are themselves learning, creativity in the face of resource constraints, and a profound respect for the student's whole linguistic and cultural self.

The goal is not to replace the Uzbek rhetorical soul with a foreign template, but to equip students with a broader communicative toolkit—to add a new rope to their existing strengths, and to weave them together. When a student can analyze a global text on environmental science and then craft a compelling, well-structured proposal for their local *mahalla* council, that is the true renaissance. It is the moment literacy stops being a subject and becomes a voice: a voice that

honors its origins, understands the world, and can speak to it with clarity, power, and purpose. The integrated classroom is the loom where this voice is woven, thread by thoughtful thread.

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