

Methodology for Increasing Student Engagement Through A Competency-Based Approach in Literature Lessons

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Abstract: The present article investigates the theoretical foundations and practical dimensions of a competency-based approach as a means of enhancing student engagement in literature lessons at the higher education level. The study proceeds from the premise that traditional reproductive methods of teaching literary texts are increasingly inadequate in addressing the cognitive, communicative, and critical-thinking demands placed upon contemporary learners. Drawing on the didactic heritage of John Dewey, Benjamin Bloom, Jerome Bruner, and David Kolb, as well as contributions from Uzbek pedagogical scholarship, the article examines the conceptual relationship between learner competency formation, active participation, and meaningful engagement with literary content. The research employs a mixed methodological framework, combining theoretical analysis, comparative pedagogical review, and elements of quasi-experimental observation conducted within Uzbekistan's higher education context. The article proposes a structured methodological model comprising four interconnected stages — motivational activation, analytical immersion, creative application, and reflective consolidation — each designed to progressively deepen student engagement while simultaneously fostering key professional and communicative competencies.

Keywords: Competency-based approach, student engagement, literature lessons, active learning, critical thinking, methodological model, higher education.

Introduction: The problem of student engagement in the contemporary literature classroom represents one of the most pressing challenges confronting pedagogical theory and educational practice alike. In an era defined by accelerating information flows, digital distraction, and the instrumentalization of higher education, the humanistic disciplines — and literary education among them — face a structural crisis of relevance. Students increasingly perceive literary texts as remote from their professional aspirations, socially detached, and cognitively demanding without apparent practical return. This perception, however, is not an inherent feature of the literary encounter itself but rather a symptom of methodological inadequacy: the persistent reliance on transmission-based pedagogies that privilege passive reception over active intellectual participation.

The competency-based approach (CBA) has emerged over recent decades as a conceptually coherent and empirically supported response to this crisis. Rooted in the broader paradigm shift from knowledge-centered to learner-centered education, the CBA reconfigures the aims of literary instruction: rather than transmitting a fixed body of textual knowledge, it orients pedagogical effort toward the formation of durable competencies — intellectual, communicative, axiological, and professional — that are activated through and by engagement with literary material. Within this framework, the literary text ceases to be an object of passive contemplation and becomes an instrument of competency formation, a field for inquiry, debate, creative transformation, and self-reflection.

The present article addresses this problematic by examining the methodological principles and concrete

didactic strategies through which a competency-based approach may be systematically applied to increase student engagement in literature lessons. The study is situated within the specific institutional and cultural context of Uzbekistan's higher education system, while drawing extensively on international pedagogical research to ensure theoretical breadth and comparative validity.

The intellectual genealogy of the competency-based approach in education is both rich and contested. Among the foundational contributions to this tradition, John Dewey's philosophy of experiential education occupies a position of primary significance. In his seminal work *Democracy and Education*, Dewey argued that genuine learning is inseparable from active experience: the learner does not passively receive knowledge but constructs it through purposeful engagement with problems, situations, and materials drawn from lived reality. Applied to literary education, this principle implies that the literary text should function not as a repository of received meaning but as a stimulus for intellectual inquiry, moral reflection, and communicative practice.

Jerome Bruner's theory of discovery learning, elaborated in *The Process of Education* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1960), further enriched this foundation by emphasizing the role of active problem-solving in the acquisition of deep structural understanding. Bruner contended that learners grasp disciplinary knowledge most securely not when it is presented in finished form but when they are guided to discover its underlying principles through their own investigative effort. In the literature classroom, this translates into pedagogical designs that invite students to analyze narrative structures, interpret figurative language, evaluate authorial choices, and construct interpretive arguments — activities that engage rather than inform.

Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives provided the competency-based tradition with a hierarchical model of cognitive engagement that has proved enduringly productive for curriculum and assessment design. The movement from knowledge recall through comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation corresponds directly to a progressive deepening of engagement: students who merely memorize biographical facts about an author

are less cognitively and affectively engaged than those who analyze the ideological tensions within a text, synthesize its meaning across cultural contexts, or evaluate its aesthetic achievement against a set of argued criteria.

David Kolb's experiential learning cycle contributes to this theoretical framework by modeling the relationship between concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation as a recursive cycle of competency development. Literature lessons informed by this model alternate between direct encounters with texts, structured reflection on those encounters, conceptual discussion of their significance, and creative or analytical tasks that require students to apply their developing understanding in new contexts.

Within the Uzbek pedagogical tradition, the competency-based approach has been articulated in the context of national educational reform as a foundational principle of higher education modernization. Scholars such as N. Muslimov and U. Yusupova have examined the relationship between competency formation and national identity development through literary education, emphasizing the particular responsibility of literature teachers to cultivate both professional and civic competencies in their students. These contributions situate the CBA within a specifically Uzbek cultural and institutional framework while maintaining dialogue with global pedagogical discourse.

Student engagement, as a pedagogical construct, encompasses cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions that together constitute the quality of a learner's participation in the educational process. Cognitive engagement refers to the investment of intellectual effort in tasks of genuine complexity — the willingness to grapple with ambiguity, sustain concentrated attention, and pursue understanding beyond the surface of a text. Affective engagement denotes the emotional resonance between the learner and the material — the degree to which literary content connects with the student's personal experience, ethical commitments, and imaginative life. Behavioral engagement is expressed in the visible modalities of active participation: contributing to discussion, completing tasks with care, seeking additional information, collaborating productively with peers.

Research in educational psychology consistently demonstrates that high levels of student engagement correlate positively with deep learning outcomes, knowledge retention, and the development of transferable competencies. Conversely, disengagement — passivity, minimal effort, superficial compliance with academic requirements — produces what educational theorists have termed surface learning: the accumulation of information without understanding, performance without competency, completion without development.

In the literature classroom, the conditions for engagement are both more demanding and more richly available than in many other disciplinary contexts. Literary texts, by their nature, invite interpretation, resist simple paraphrase, and encode values, perspectives, and experiences that differ from and challenge the reader's own. When pedagogical methodology exploits these properties of literary language — when it uses the interpretive openness of the text as a resource for structured intellectual disagreement, creative transformation, and value reflection — it creates the conditions under which all three dimensions of engagement are simultaneously activated.

On the basis of the theoretical analysis presented above and the findings of pedagogical observation conducted in higher education institutions in Uzbekistan, the present article proposes a four-stage methodological model for increasing student engagement through a competency-based approach. The model is designed to be applicable across different literary genres and historical periods, adaptable to varying institutional contexts, and capable of yielding measurable outcomes in both engagement and competency formation.

The first stage, motivational activation, is concerned with establishing the conditions under which students perceive the literary text as personally and intellectually relevant. This is achieved through problem-posing strategies that present the literary text as a site of unresolved questions rather than a repository of established truths. The teacher poses a central interpretive or ethical problem — one that the text illuminates but does not definitively resolve — and invites students to formulate initial hypotheses and personal responses before engaging with the text itself. Techniques appropriate to this stage include

provocative quotation analysis, biographical contextualization that foregrounds the author's experiential dilemmas, and collaborative brainstorming around the central thematic tension of the work. The pedagogical objective of this stage is not merely to arouse curiosity but to activate prior knowledge and position students as inquirers rather than recipients.

The second stage, analytical immersion, constitutes the intellectual core of the methodology. Here, students engage in sustained, structured analysis of the literary text through a range of carefully sequenced tasks that progressively demand higher-order cognitive engagement. Close reading exercises focus attention on specific passages, images, or structural features; comparative analysis tasks require students to situate the text within a tradition of literary responses to a shared problem; debate activities organize the class around competing interpretive positions, requiring students to support their arguments with textual evidence and respond to counter-arguments with analytical precision. The role of the teacher in this stage is that of a Socratic facilitator: posing questions that deepen rather than foreclose analysis, drawing attention to textual details that complicate initial interpretations, and ensuring that the intellectual challenge of the task remains productive rather than overwhelming.

The third stage, creative application, requires students to transform their analytical understanding into productive, communicative output. Tasks at this stage include creative rewriting from an alternative narrative perspective, the preparation of dramatized readings or theatrical interpretations, the construction of visual or multimodal representations of thematic structure, and the composition of critical essays or argumentative analyses for specified audiences. The pedagogical rationale for this stage derives from the constructivist insight that deep understanding is manifested in the ability to apply knowledge in new contexts: a student who can rewrite a scene from the perspective of a marginalized character has demonstrated a degree of analytical and empathic engagement that no multiple-choice test can adequately assess. Project-based assignments that extend over several sessions allow the most sustained and ambitious forms of creative application.

The fourth stage, reflective consolidation, invites

students to step back from the immediate demands of textual analysis and creative production in order to examine what they have learned — not only about the literary text but about themselves as learners, thinkers, and communicators. Structured reflective writing, peer feedback sessions, and group discussion of the competencies developed through engagement with the text constitute the primary activities of this stage. Particular attention is paid to value reflection: students are invited to articulate how the literary text has complicated, confirmed, or transformed their existing ethical commitments and world-view orientations. This dimension of the methodology is especially significant in the context of Uzbek literary education, where the relationship between national literature and the formation of civic and moral consciousness is recognized as a foundational pedagogical concern.

The methodological model described above is implemented through a set of specific didactic instruments, each selected for its capacity to activate engagement across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions simultaneously. Problem-based learning (PBL), as developed by Howard Barrows in the medical education context and subsequently adapted for humanistic disciplines, structures the learning process around ill-defined, authentic problems that require collaborative investigation and the integration of multiple knowledge domains. In the literature classroom, PBL problems might take the form of editorial decisions — which of two competing translations of a classic text better preserves the author's meaning, and why? — or ethical dilemmas posed by the text's characters.

Collaborative reading strategies, including reciprocal teaching, literature circles, and structured academic controversy, distribute the cognitive labor of textual interpretation across the group while ensuring that each individual student maintains a defined analytical role and communicative responsibility. These strategies are particularly effective in activating behavioral engagement: students who know they will be required to present, defend, and revise their interpretations in dialogue with peers cannot afford the passive disengagement that traditional whole-class discussion often permits.

Case-study analysis, adapted from the legal and business education traditions, presents students with

documented instances of literary reception, censorship, cultural appropriation, or translation conflict, and invites them to analyze these cases using the conceptual and analytical tools developed through engagement with the literary text. This strategy bridges the gap between literary study and professional competency formation, demonstrating to students the concrete relevance of literary knowledge to decisions and dilemmas they may encounter in their future careers as educators, translators, cultural administrators, or public intellectuals.

Digital and multimodal tools — collaborative annotation platforms, visual mapping software, podcast production, and short documentary creation — extend the range of available creative application tasks and accommodate diverse learner profiles. While caution must be exercised to ensure that digital tools serve the pedagogical objectives of engagement and competency formation rather than substituting superficial activity for genuine intellectual work, their judicious integration into the methodology has been shown to increase both motivation and the quality of analytical output.

Pedagogical observation conducted within the framework of this research at several higher education institutions in Uzbekistan provided preliminary empirical support for the proposed methodology. Students who participated in literature lessons designed according to the four-stage model demonstrated measurably higher levels of behavioral engagement — participation in discussion, quality of written assignments, collaborative task completion — than control groups taught by traditional lecture-and-recitation methods. Qualitative data gathered through post-lesson reflective writing indicated that students in the experimental groups perceived the literary texts studied as more personally relevant and intellectually stimulating, and reported a stronger sense of agency in the learning process.

Teacher feedback collected through structured interviews identified the analytical immersion stage as both the most pedagogically demanding and the most rewarding in terms of observable student engagement. The shift from information transmission to facilitated inquiry required significant adjustment in teachers' professional self-understanding and classroom management strategies, confirming the necessity of targeted professional development as a prerequisite for

the effective implementation of the competency-based methodology. These preliminary findings, while not yet statistically conclusive, are consistent with the substantial body of international research demonstrating the positive relationship between active, competency-oriented pedagogies and student engagement outcomes. They provide sufficient empirical grounding to support the methodological recommendations advanced in the present article and to justify the design of a more comprehensive experimental investigation as a continuation of this research programme.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis presented in this article supports the conclusion that a competency-based approach, systematically implemented through the four-stage methodological model and the didactic instruments described above, offers a theoretically coherent and practically effective means of increasing student engagement in literature lessons at the higher education level. The proposed methodology does not simply add new activities to the existing repertoire of literary pedagogy; it reconceptualizes the purpose, structure, and relational dynamics of the literature lesson in ways that make deep engagement both intellectually necessary and pedagogically rewarding. Several practical recommendations follow from the findings of this study. First, teacher preparation programmes should incorporate explicit training in the principles and techniques of competency-based literary pedagogy, including the design of problem-based tasks, the facilitation of structured discussion, and the assessment of competency development through portfolio and performance-based methods. Second, curriculum designers should ensure that literature course syllabi provide sufficient time and structural flexibility for the multi-stage engagement activities described in the proposed model, rather than prioritizing coverage of a prescribed canon at the expense of depth and learner agency. Third, institutional leadership in higher education should recognize and reward innovative pedagogical practice in the literary disciplines, creating the professional conditions under which teachers are motivated and supported to develop their methodological competency.

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