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Scientific literary research of high school and university students: Methodology of competition defences

Abstract. The relevance of the study is driven by the need to develop research and interpretative competencies among high school and university students in response to modern educational challenges. The aim of this article was a comprehensive analysis of the methodology for preparing scientific literary studies within the framework of defence competitions, focusing on fostering critical thinking and the ability to independently interpret literary texts. Methods of analysis, synthesis, comparison, interpretation, and observation were applied. The empirical component of the study was based on long-term (3 years) observation of regional competitions in Ukraine, in which the authors participated as jury members. Particular emphasis was placed on the communicative aspect of research activity – how students present their findings, interact with the audience, and answer questions. The article also examined the differences between student and school-level research, emphasising the depth of conceptualisation and interdisciplinary vision required at the university level. The results of the analysis of the topics and problems most frequently encountered in the scientific works of students of secondary and higher educational institutions revealed certain patterns in terms of repetition in regions (Cherkasy, Kirovohrad, and Poltava regions) and years of writing (2023-2025). Patterns were identified in the selection of topics and issues for scientific research in Ukrainian and foreign literature. The practical value of the article lies in providing recommendations for improving the quality of scientific works, forming a culture of academic integrity, preparing for public speaking, and developing scientific communication skills. The study contributes to the formation of a sustainable model of mentoring literary research in modern educational conditions

Keywords: interpretation competence; academic integrity; cognitive poetics; comparative studies; interdisciplinary approach; scientific communication

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INTRODUCTION

Modern challenges of social development necessitate the rethinking of the educational process, particularly in the field of students' and pupils' research activities. The formation of skills to search for and process information, to develop critical thinking and creativity, becomes one of the priority tasks of the New Ukrainian School and higher education. Research activity not only contributes to knowledge acquisition but also forms a scientific worldview, cultivates the ability for self-development and self-expression. Participation in scientific paper competitions serves as an effective tool for preparing future professionals and motivates young people toward intellectual growth.

O. Isaieva (2023) determined that under the conditions of military aggression, new approaches to literary education become especially significant. She emphasised the importance not only of theoretical training and the development of critical thinking but also of forming postcolonial consciousness, a Ukraine-centered approach, and consideration of students' psychological state. The author also proposed modern reading strategies that can be applied in students' creative scientific work. G.A. Serdyuk (2023) explored the issue of forming research competencies among teachers of the Ukrainian language and literature. The researcher argued that the key factor is effective management of educational resources, the ability to set learning goals and achieve them, build a professional trajectory, objectively assess results, and strive for lifelong learning. In her study, O.A. Slyzhuk (2022) highlighted research activity as a means of developing subject-specific and key competencies. The system of tasks she developed contributed to the optimisation of literature study, the formation of positive self-esteem among students, the development of their creative abilities, and the growth of interest in learning. The researcher also proposed an algorithm for developing independent information-searching skills through internet services and mastering deep literary analysis. O.V. Khomenko (2021) considered research activity as an effective technology for the formation of research skills. In the process of writing scientific papers, which integrate analytical-synthetic, informational, creative, and communicative skills, students developed creative thinking as well as linguistic and communicative competencies.

W. Karunarathne & A. Calma (2024) found that the most important aspects of student research are creative self-expression, knowledge acquisition, and creative problem solving. The researchers emphasised the value of sustained inquiry, paradoxical thinking, and continuous motivation for research. R. Sosa & K. David (2020) identified that student research papers encompass a variety of genres from essays and reflective journals to research projects. They analysed key issues in academic literacy, such as the development of creativity, the ability to conduct inquiry, and the integration of different approaches to working with texts. Ö. Yılmaz (2024) studied the problem of student research in the era of the internet, e-learning, and distance education. The scholar focused on new forms of academic interaction shaped by digitalisation and highlighted the necessity of combining traditional research methods with modern technologies.

The purpose of this article was to present a comprehensive methodology for preparing research papers in Ukrainian and world literature by high school and university students, which includes writing the work, readiness for poster defence (for school students), and participation in scientific conferences.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the research process, a set of methods combining theoretical and empirical approaches was used, each serving a specific function in studying the problem. In particular, analysis was applied to identify the stages of preparing scientific papers (topic selection, working with sources, text formatting, etc.). This method made it possible to thoroughly examine each stage and outline common mistakes and challenges faced by students. Synthesis served as the basis for summarising the obtained results and integrating individual observations into a holistic model of the methodology for preparing literary studies. Thanks to synthesis, recommendations were formulated aimed at improving the quality of papers and enhancing preparation for defence competitions.

Comparison was used to identify similarities and differences between school student and student papers. The method of interpretation involved comprehending the research results, explaining individual elements of literary texts, artistic techniques, imagery systems, and stylistic dominants. To study the practical aspect of preparing research papers, empirical methods were used, particularly observation. The observation phase was conducted over three academic years (September 2022 – May 2025) at the National Center "Small Academy of Sciences of Ukraine" and regional centers in Poltava, Cherkasy, and Kirovohrad regions. The process included monitoring students' preparation for academic competitions, analysing their oral presentations, communication style, reasoning, and their ability to maintain academic integrity. For analysis, research projects from the sections Ukrainian Literature and Foreign Literature for 2023-2025 from the Poltava, Cherkasy, and Kirovohrad regions were selected. For the comparative aspect, the following thematic blocks were proposed literary and aesthetic issues, relationship issues, personality issues, social issues, historical and national issues, philosophical issues, and comparative works. During the period 2023-2025, 143 works were presented in the Ukrainian Literature section and 115 projects in the Foreign Literature section at the second (regional) stage of the competition-defence of research projects. The authors participated in the observation as members of the jury for the regional stage of the All-Ukrainian research competition, which enabled them to directly record both preparatory aspects and the course of the defences themselves.

Ethical principles were strictly adhered to throughout the study. All participants were informed about the nature

of the observation, and their participation was voluntary and anonymous. The study was conducted in accordance with the Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine No. 422 (2006) and Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine No. 947 (2025). Academic literature related to research in the field of literary studies and educational methodology was used as part of the theoretical basis. For example, C. Coffin *et al.* (2003) provided an overview of academic writing practices, while O. Isaieva (2005) outlined pedagogical approaches to literary studies at the high school level. The literature was selected based on its relevance, scientific reliability, and publication in peer-reviewed journals or academic institutions. Sources were obtained from Google Scholar, JSTOR, and the digital database of the National Library of Ukraine.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the modern paradigm of literary education, research activity conducted by high school and university students is viewed not as an optional component but as an essential condition for the development of interpretive, communicative, and critical competencies. Through individual philological projects, knowledge from literary theory, literary history, poetics, hermeneutics, and stylistics is integrated, while skills in analysing literary texts and producing scholarly expression are simultaneously developed. Research in literary education, both at school and university levels, shares a common goal: to cultivate a creative, critically thinking, and engaged reader and emerging scholar. At the same time, an evolution in research competence is observable – from intuitive interpretation to analytical argumentation. The implementation of a competency-based education model has led to a rethinking of the goals and methods

of literary studies. At the core of the educational process lies the development of integrated skills: the ability to independently analyse a literary work, construct an interpretive model, and substantiate conclusions. These skills are most effectively developed through research activity.

For high school students, research is often a way to connect personal experience with literary reality. Such works tend to be emotional and fragmentary in their conclusions but reflect a sincere engagement with meaning. They are often descriptive-interpretive in character, with theoretical frameworks playing a secondary, supportive role. In contrast, student research at the university level requires academic rigor, engagement with a broad source base, and citation of authoritative scholarly opinions. Personal interpretation here is complemented by context – literary, cultural, and philosophical. A university paper must demonstrate the student's ability to think scientifically, to model a problem, and to apply contemporary scholarly approaches. Despite the shared methodological foundation of the competency-based approach, the depth of competence realisation differs. For school students, the primary task is to recognise a literary problem; for university students, it is to conceptualise and interpret it through a theoretical lens. The process of producing a research project in the school or university environment requires clear organisation, sequence, and adherence to methodological logic. O. Isaieva (2005) proposed a structured algorithm that encompasses the key stages of research activity – from choosing a topic to the final defence. This approach not only standardises the process but also makes it possible to trace the development of scientific thinking and analytical skills at each stage. The stages of writing scientific student papers are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Stages of preparing scientific work (research)

No.	Stage	Main tasks/characteristics	Result
1.	Choosing a research topic	Assessing relevance, novelty, and prospects; formulating a specific research question; focusing on the scientific context and availability of sources.	A clearly formulated and substantiated research topic.
2.	Analysis of scientific sources	Collection and review of specialised literature; analysis of existing theoretical approaches; assessment of the contribution of sources to the development of the problem.	Review of literature on the problem; basis for scientific argumentation.
3	Systematisation of selected sources	Classification of sources (by approach, school of thought, chronology, type); identification of gaps in research and scientific discussions.	Structured catalog of sources; identification of theoretical "nodes" of the problem.
4.	Drawing up an initial plan	Developing the structure of the work (introduction, sections, conclusions); establishing logical connections between sections; distributing material according to volume and complexity.	Preliminary plan (conceptual matrix) of the study.
5.	Processing and organising material	In-depth analysis of the text (motifs, images, structures, strategies); interpretive approach; identifying connections between form and content.	Interpretation of artistic text; preparation of material for analysis.
6.	Formulation of a general research hypothesis	Formulation of an assumption that explains the phenomenon under study; ensuring conceptual accuracy, verifiability, and scientific novelty.	A clearly formulated hypothesis, logically derived from the theoretical basis.
7.	Choosing scientific methods and formulating methodology	Determining the methodological basis (structural-semantic analysis, discourse analysis, intertextuality, etc.); justifying the choice of methods.	Clearly defined and justified research methodology.
8.	Practical application of the chosen methodology	Implementation of methods in practical text analysis; interpretation of plot, motifs, narrative time, imagery.	Results of text analysis; demonstration of competence and consistency in reasoning.

Table 1. Continue

No.	Stage	Main tasks/characteristics	Result
9.	Writing the sections of the work	Combining the results into a coherent academic text; adherence to the norms of scientific style (structure, argumentation, citation, clarity).	Draft version of the entire work; balance and integrity of argumentation.
10.	Formatting the work in accordance with requirements	Compliance with formatting standards (length, font, spacing, title page, bibliography, academic integrity statement).	Final version of the work, ready for submission.
11.	Defence of the research	Public presentation of results; demonstration of the ability to clearly state the purpose, methodology, conclusions; answers to questions.	Completed project.

Source: compiled by authors based on O. Isaieva (2005)

Thus, the structure of the research process outlined O. Isaieva represents a universal algorithm that can be adapted to various levels of academic preparation – from a creative school project to a bachelor's or master's thesis. Its value lies in the gradual formation not only of academic writing skills but also of holistic philological thinking. Each stage is logically connected to the previous one, enabling a consistent progression from idea to successful defence. One of the key goals of literary research in secondary school is to develop students' ability to independently study a literary work as an object of philological analysis. This requires not only a genuine interest in the topic, but also a clear understanding of the methodological sequence from the initial idea to the creation of a coherent academic text. The methodology of students' scientific work is described in detail in the works of V.M. Sheiko & N.M. Kushnarenko (2008). The process begins with the selection of a topic that is both personally meaningful to the student and potentially valuable from an academic point of view. At this stage, the role of the research supervisor is particularly important, as the teacher helps to transform the student's intuitive interest into a well-formulated topic with a clearly defined object, subject, and hypothesis. Student research work should follow the structure of an academic text: an introduction with a statement of the problem and justification, a brief but representative review of the literature, a main analytical section with careful reading, and a conclusion supported by a list of references. The problems of structuring scientific work and interpreting academic texts are addressed in detailed articles by C. Coffin *et al.* (2003) and T. Lillis (2008). They are devoted to the issues of structuring scientific work and interpreting academic texts. They define the tasks for the author of the work and the supervisor, in particular, to gradually learn to substantiate arguments, interpret artistic texts, give examples, and make intermediate and general conclusions. Key skills include the ability to generalise observations, integrate quotations, select appropriate illustrations, and maintain a coherent line of reasoning.

One of the greatest difficulties for school students is working with theoretical sources. Due to their lack of experience in searching for and evaluating academic literature, students often rely heavily on their advisor, who plays a vital role in shaping their philological competence. The teacher should provide a basic list of sources, help evaluate their scientific value, and teach students to distinguish between essential concepts and avoid uncritically reproducing other people's ideas. Particular attention should be paid to working with literary dictionaries, encyclopedias, academic collections, and critical articles (including English-language sources, where possible). The advisor should gradually teach the student how to integrate authoritative scientific opinions into their argumentation this is especially important for the analytical part of the work. S. Verba (2023) focused on the ability to creatively apply the latest achievements in science and technology in practical activities, raising issues of regulatory and legal support for students' research work. The advisor serves not only as a source of knowledge but also as a mentor in the development of scientific thinking. The teacher helps students avoid common mistakes – superficiality, inconsistency, excessive emotionality, or simplistic interpretations. At the same time, the consultant should not replace the student's voice with their own, overly edit the text, or impose excessive formalisation. O.P. Mikhno (2008) wrote about the specifics of the student research method, emphasising dealing with "research of the already known", so the supervisor should not exaggerate the research capabilities of students, but also not leave them within the limits of training exercises. Effective cooperation between the student and the advisor is based on dialogue, joint consideration of the problem, and step-by-step completion of the work. The role of the teacher is not only to guide but also to inspire asking questions that encourage reflection, encouraging independent thinking, and developing a research mindset, "without stifling students' creativity".

The diversity of topics presented at the 2025 All-Ukrainian Junior Academy of Sciences Research Competition reflects a high level of literary awareness among students and their readiness to engage with complex social, philosophical, and cultural issues through the lens of literature (Junior Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, n.d.). In the World Literature section, a notable example is the research project by Sofiia Yermakova (Poltava region), dedicated to architectural imagery in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's philosophical novel "Citadel". The study examines symbols such as the citadel, temple, and house as artistic representations of existential concepts like responsibility, freedom, and identity. The student analyses metaphorical space as a fusion of physical, psychological, and social dimensions. Yana Vyvalnyuk's (Cherkasy region) project, "Artistic and Semantic Interpretation of the Phenomenon of Silence

in the Novel "Kim Ji-young, Born 1982" by Cho Nam-joo", presents a conceptually well-formulated research problem that integrates philological and sociocultural approaches. At its core is the theme of silence as both a literary device and a manifestation of gender trauma. The paper is notable for its contemporary relevance, theoretical depth, and psychological insight.

Mariia Zadorozhna's (Kirovohrad region) project, "Narrative Strategies in John Fowles's Novel the Collector", offers an in-depth analysis of narrative perspective, structural dynamics, and the narrator's role as a vehicle of psychological manipulation. The research demonstrates the student's ability to apply concepts such as "internal focaliser" and "narrative manipulation", reflecting a high level of analytical competence. The posters for the above-mentioned projects are available on the official competition website Junior Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (n.d.). O. Isaieva (2023) rightly emphasised that in scientific research papers, it is essential first and foremost to present

one's own conclusions rather than simply summarising the works of other scholars (which, unfortunately, often becomes evident only at the stage of defence). Compiling fragmented excerpts from often questionable sources and presenting them as original research is unacceptable. For the practical implementation of these requirements, the competence of school teachers who supervise such research is sometimes insufficient. Whenever possible, it is necessary to involve qualified specialists and researchers in the preparation of these papers. Overall, the analysis of research topics demonstrates a high level of student interest in contemporary methodological approaches and critical strategies, as well as their desire to combine traditional literary analysis tools with innovative perspectives on the text. There is a noticeable deep interest in literary heritage and contemporary artistic phenomena, the ability of young researchers to perceive sociocultural contexts, comprehend psychological issues, and interpret artistic forms through the lens of the latest scientific paradigms (Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of student research projects by region, subject, and year of completion

№	Region	Subject, topic	Ukrainian literature			Foreign literature		
			2023	2024	2025	2023	2024	2025
	Cherkasy Region	**Total works**	**16**	**18**	**11**	**14**	**18**	**11**
	Kirovohrad Region	**Total works**	**15**	**14**	**13**	**11**	**12**	**8**
	Poltava Region	**Total works**	**18**	**20**	**18**	**11**	**13**	**12**
1.	Cherkasy Region	**Literary and aesthetic**	3	5	5	3	4	3
	Kirovohrad Region		7	6	5	4	4	3
	Poltava Region		6	7	6	4	6	4
2.	Cherkasy Region	**Relationship issues**	1	3	0	1	1	2
	Kirovohrad Region		7	3	4	5	6	3
	Poltava Region		6	5	5	4	4	4
3.	Cherkasy Region	**Personality issues**	4	2	3	2	3	0
	Kirovohrad Region		8	3	4	5	6	3
	Poltava Region		6	4	4	6	5	5
4.	Cherkasy Region	**Social issues**	0	2	0	2	2	1
	Kirovohrad Region		5	2	5	3	3	3
	Poltava Region		7	6	4	5	4	4
5.	Cherkasy Region	**Historical and national issues**	7	5	3	5	6	2
	Kirovohrad Region		5	4	2	2	3	0
	Poltava Region		4	5	4	1	2	1
6.	Cherkasy Region	**Philosophical issues**	1	1	0	1	1	3
	Kirovohrad Region		8	6	5	6	3	1
	Poltava Region		7	7	3	4	5	4
7.	Cherkasy Region	**Comparative works**	2	3	3	1	3	4
	Kirovohrad Region		2	1	1	1	0	0
	Poltava Region		2	2	0	2	3	2

Source: compiled by authors

The research interests of young researchers and their mentors were distributed as follows: in the Ukrainian Literature section for 2023-2025, 50 participants (35% of the total number of works) researched literary and aesthetic issues, in the Foreign Literature section – 37 (32%); relationship issues – Ukrainian Literature – 34 (24%), Foreign Literature – 30 (26%); personal issues – Ukrainian Literature – 38 (27%), Foreign Literature 35 (30%); social issues –

Ukrainian Literature – 31 (22%), Foreign Literature – 27 (24%); historical and national issues – Ukrainian Literature – 39 (27%), Foreign Literature – 22 (19%); philosophical topics were raised in 35 projects (25%) in the Ukrainian Literature section and 28 (24%) researchers of foreign literature; 16 young researchers (11%) in the Ukrainian Literature section and 16 (14%) in the Foreign Literature section were interested in comparative studies.

As can see, the field of literary studies was of greatest interest to young researchers from both sections. Philosophical questions, themes of relationships and personality also attracted the attention of MAN listeners. The authors of projects in the Ukrainian Literature section focused more on national and historical issues in their works than the participants in the Foreign Literature section, and researchers of world literature are more interested in comparative analysis of texts than their colleagues from the Ukrainian Literature section. The diverse topics of the projects presented at the regional stage of the competition-defence indicate that the authors of scientific research are trying to comprehend the semantic field of the text at all its levels, to grasp the aesthetic concept of the artist, to understand the essence of the author-reader dialogue, go beyond the boundaries of a work of art, and see its place in a multicultural space. Since the authors of the works are young people aged 14 to 20, it is natural that, due to the peculiarities of age-related psychological development, young scholars are most attracted to topics of human relationships and the spiritual path of the individual. During the years of russia full-scale invasion of Ukraine, young Ukrainians have been particularly interested in national issues, social life, the place of the individual in society, civic position, eternal questions of life and death, borderline situations, and so on.

The preparation of a student research paper at a university in Ukrainian and world literature is a complex and multifaceted process that requires not only academic discipline from the student but also a high level of analytical thinking, critical evaluation of sources, and deep immersion in the contexts of literary works. Unlike school papers, which are usually focused on a descriptive-analytical level and concentrate on revealing a single topic or individual work, university student research should contain theoretical novelty and offer the student's own vision of the problem; they often may be interdisciplinary. Preparing such work begins with choosing a relevant and scientifically significant topic, which can relate to both contemporary literature and classical texts in a modern interpretation. In student work, the topic always goes beyond purely literary analysis and touches on philosophical, cultural, and sociological aspects. An important stage is the formation of the hypothesis and the clear definition of the aim and research objectives. At this level, the student must justify why their research is relevant, what its scientific novelty is, and how the results can be applied in a broader scientific or cultural context. A student paper requires a thorough review of the source base, including not only Ukrainian but also foreign scholarly publications and materials from specialised databases. Unlike school projects, where the methodological apparatus is often limited to general literary techniques, university student research requires the use of complex methods: cognitive poetics, comparative studies, hermeneutics, intermedial studies, psychoanalytic analysis, and more. This allows a deeper exploration of the topic, showing its complexity and connections with other fields of knowledge.

In-depth textual analysis in university student papers should demonstrate the ability to work with literary material, argue, draw original conclusions, and showcase interpretative competence. In the final conclusions, the student must clearly outline their own scientific contribution and define what future research perspectives their work opens. Equally important is the public presentation of research results. The university student must prepare an informative presentation, often with multimedia support, confidently defend their ideas before a panel, and respond to questions from opponents. This format develops skills of scientific communication, critical dialogue, and the ability to popularise the results of their own work. Analysing student research papers proposed the following topics for student research in Ukrainian literature at institutions of higher education:

➤ deconstruction of the mother archetype in the novels by contemporary Ukrainian women writers;

➤ poetics of post-traumatic experience in the poetry of Lina Kostenko and Serhiy Zhadan;

➤ the phenomenon of silence as an artistic device in the prose of Valerian Pidmohylny;

➤ reception of ancient myths in contemporary Ukrainian poetry;

➤ the concept of "city" in war prose by 21st-century Ukrainian;

➤ feminist interpretations of the image of Carmen in European and Ukrainian literature;

➤ poetics of magical realism in the works of Lesya Voronyna.

For world literature, promising topics include: the philosophy of existence in the novels of Albert Camus and Ukrainian Sixtiers writers: a comparative aspect; the metaphor of the labyrinth in the works of Jorge Luis Borges and Umberto Eco; poetics of trauma in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel "Never Let Me Go": an interdisciplinary analysis; the image of women in the novels of Virginia Woolf and Maria Matios: parallels and contrasts; intermediality in the "Harry Potter" series by J.K. Rowling: literature, cinema, and fandom culture.

Trends in contemporary literature determine the choice of topics for student research papers, the relevance of the topics and issues raised in the works, and the novelty of comparative analysis. The focus was placed not only on the written texts but also on their mode of presentation, the nature of interaction with the audience, and the level of academic integrity demonstrated by the participants. Mastering research experience for a modern specialist means developing the abilities that allow one to act not according to ready-made algorithms but, when faced with new conditions, to make non-standard decisions and to predict their consequences. However, to achieve these goals, students must go through a challenging path of creative exploration, according to V. Yankin (2025).

Thus, the student's research paper at a university becomes an important stage in shaping the researcher's professional identity, fostering their critical thinking, ability

to innovate, academic integrity, and the capacity to tackle complex problems in modern conditions. First and foremost, it is the choice of a literary work for analysis. It is important that the text has artistic and aesthetic value; sometimes young researchers choose low-quality works, which diminishes the value of their research. A typical mistake is the absence of a literary analysis component; as noted above, the theoretical part is essential for revealing the value of the work and demonstrating depth of study. Students often submit a writer's biography instead of a scientific discourse, even though neither the aim nor the objectives included the analysis of the author's life path.

A common mistake is the disconnection between the theoretical part and the interpretation of the text; for example, the theoretical section might contain a scientific discourse on the theory of dystopia in literature (study of W. Golding's novel Lord of the Flies), while the analysis of the semantic field of the novel focuses on features of its figurative system. It is important to pay attention to the coherence between the scientific apparatus of the project and the main content of the work; it often happens that the stated objectives are not actually realised in the main part of the study. Furthermore, it is essential that the general conclusions analyse the aims and tasks of the work in the context of their implementation. In the analytical-interpretative section, not only is a deep analysis of the work important, but also the confirmation of one's own ideas with quotations from the text. Sometimes, project authors neglect citation material, which leads to a loss of the work's integrity. It is necessary to emphasise to young researchers the importance of independence and originality in presenting material, avoiding mere summaries and reproducing others' ideas.

The most important stage of research activity is the defence competition itself. It is held in three rounds for school students and in two stages for university students: remote evaluation, poster defence (only for school students), and a scientific conference. Here, both practical and psychological preparation of the participants must be considered. The poster defence involves communication between the student (a Junior Academy of Sciences member) and the jury; the author of the project has three minutes to present their work, explain the scientific apparatus, and showcase the main results of the research. It is important to remember that the speech text should be adapted for oral delivery, taking into account the differences between oral and written language. After the presentation, the participant must answer the jury's questions. It is crucial to note that the jury assesses not only the level of familiarity of the young researcher with their own work but also their emotional state (enthusiasm for the project, a positive mood, or, conversely, fear and uncertainty). When answering questions, the participant must not only defend their position but also remember the ethics of scientific discussion. During the conference, participants are given 7-10 minutes to present their project (ideally, the presentations at the poster defence and

the conference should not be identical). It is advisable to prepare a presentation that highlights the "highlights" of the research. The conference also includes answering questions from other participants, and the quality of the questions posed to others is also evaluated. This is usually the most interesting stage of the defence: the audience (other Junior Academy members and students) has the opportunity not only to present their own projects but also to get acquainted with others. To succeed in this stage, one should not only carefully prepare their oral presentation but also attentively listen to other participants, ask accurate and insightful questions that show an understanding of the topic of other studies.

Thus, it should be noted that the difference between university student works and school student works lies not only in their complexity, volume, or academic structure, but also in the conceptual level of topic reflection, deep self-reflection, and the desire to find one's voice in the scientific community. Thanks to the system of school (Junior Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, n.d.) and university student literature competitions, a continuous trajectory of developing research competencies is formed, beginning at school and improving at the university level. This enables the cultivation of a generation of scholars capable of creative thinking, generating original ideas, and influencing the development of modern humanities. The results obtained during the empirical study reveal a number of trends related to the development of a research culture among high school and university students. The combination of competitive research papers by high school and university students was in line with the objective of this study. It should be noted that the issue of research activities in schools and higher education institutions has been addressed in a number of scientific publications. L.P. Alyoshkina & I.M. Novak (2021) justified the use of the latest methods of organising scientific and research activities of higher education seekers, in particular, the use of project technologies, as a promising direction for the development of scientific and research activities of students in higher education institutions at the present stage. O.V. Plakhotnik (2020) addressed the preparatory work for scientific work by involving students in subject or research clubs that involve studying the principles, methods, and techniques of scientific work, focusing on individual stages of scientific activity. E.A. Pineteh (2013) proposed a very appropriate strategy for developing students' scientific and creative skills by integrating academic literacy into disciplinary programs and promoting multimodal teaching and assessment. These strategies are possible with close cooperation between language teachers and specialists in core courses. The effectiveness of vertical interdisciplinary programs for the development of academic writing is described by C. Fazio *et al.* (2021), who conducted long-term research at Polish universities. This study focused on the genre, thematic, and problem-oriented nature of the 2023-2025 writing assignments from different regions of the country,

which allowed to conclude that the selected works left a strong emotional impression or raised socially significant issues such as war, trauma, identity, ethical dilemmas, or gender experience.

The development of creative thinking as an important component of research activity accompanies all stages of scientific research. W. Karunarathne & A. Calma (2024) defined creativity as creative self-expression and creative problem-solving. According to researchers E. Karpova *et al.* (2011), in the process of working on creative research, changes in creativity should be taken into account, and the reasons for individual decline in creativity should be identified if such a trend is observed. S. Pukhno (2013) analysed algorithms of active search and research activities at the problem level that contribute to the intellectual and search growth of students, as well as potentially contribute to the emergence of their desire for scientific creativity. S. Pukhno's conclusions are consistent with the results of this study, in particular, the statement about the transition from theoretical to reflective-professional thinking. It is advisable to create problem-solving clubs for students, which, under the guidance of leading scientists, would study professional problems over a long period of time. A promising area of research into the process of writing scientific competition papers by students is the problem of assessment. I. Izarova *et al.* (2024) suggested moving away from traditional quantitative methods to more meaningful and effective assessment methods, in particular, scientific influence, diversity of methodologies and topics, as well as the importance of inclusiveness and interdisciplinarity. V. Ratnikov & A. Teklyuk (2022) warned against the value neutrality of scientific research, as it counteracts the ethical analysis of scientific knowledge, which in turn opens up meaningful perspectives for considering and solving various social, moral, and other problems related to scientific knowledge in a sociocultural context.

The observations of this study partly coincide with the conclusions presented in the article by V. Yankin (2025), which emphasised that the development of the ability to act in conditions of uncertainty and make non-standard decisions is one of the key results of student participation in scientific research. The author argues that research activity is not just a component of the educational process, but a form of deep participation in the act of cognition that contributes to the development of an individual's style of thinking. This perspective fully correlates with the analysis of student research competition projects made in this work. Another point of convergence is V. Yankin's assertion about the importance of transitioning from actions based on fixed algorithms to actions in non-standard situations.

This article supports this thesis and expands it with further clarifications: the key factor in this transition is the gradual increase in the complexity of research tasks – from descriptive and reproductive to interpretative, analytical, and problem-solving. The analysis of the competition entries confirms that participants who go beyond the generalisation of theoretical concepts and instead develop their own model of analysis of literary texts demonstrate a higher level of research readiness, which confirms the conclusion about the need to educate researchers as authors, not just consumers of knowledge.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the preparation of scientific literary studies by school students and university students within the framework of defence competitions is an important factor in developing their research and interpretative competence. Special importance is given to academic integrity, the ability to work with primary sources, and high standards of scientific ethics. Defence competitions act as an effective tool for socialisation and the formation of academic culture, encouraging young people to self-education, finding their own scientific voice, and improving their level of scientific communication. The analysis of typical mistakes made by school and university students contributed to the development of recommendations for improving the theoretical and analytical level of the works. An important aspect was also the need for the holistic integration of theoretical and practical components of research, strengthening the argumentative basis, and relying on textual sources.

Overall, the study confirmed the effectiveness of research activity as a tool for forming future scholars capable of critical analysis, creative understanding of literary phenomena, and generating innovative ideas in the humanities. Future scientific searches can focus on the development and testing of specialised training programs and methodological manuals for school and university students, which will promote the development of interpretative competence and scientific argumentation. It is also advisable to conduct comparative studies on the preparation of scientific papers in different regions of Ukraine and abroad, in order to identify universal and local strategies for developing research competencies.

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Наукові літературознавчі дослідження старшокласників і студентів: методика конкурсних захистів

Анотація. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена необхідністю розвитку дослідницьких та інтерпретаційних компетенцій у учнів старших класів та вищих навчальних закладів у відповідь на сучасні освітні виклики. Метою цієї статті був комплексний аналіз методології підготовки наукових літературознавчих досліджень у рамках конкурсів-захистів, зосереджуючись на розвитку критичного мислення та здатності самостійно інтерпретувати художні тексти. Були застосовані методи аналізу, синтезу, порівняння, інтерпретації та спостереження. Емпірична складова дослідження базувалася на довгостроковому (3 роки) спостереженні за конкурсами регіонального рівня в Україні, в яких автори брали участь як члени журі. Особливий акцент робився на комунікативному аспекті дослідницької діяльності – як студенти презентують свої висновки, взаємодіють з аудиторією та відповідають на запитання. У статті також розглядалися відмінності між дослідженнями студентського та шкільного рівня, підкреслюючи глибину концептуалізації та міждисциплінарне бачення, необхідне на університетському рівні. Результати аналізу тем та проблем, які найчастіше зустрічаються в наукових роботах студентів середніх та вищих навчальних закладів, виявили певні закономірності у повторюваності у регіонах (Черкаська, Кіровоградська та Полтавська області) та роках написання (2023-2025). Були визначені закономірності у виборі тем та проблем наукових досліджень з української та зарубіжної літератури. Практична цінність статті полягає в наданні рекомендацій щодо покращення якості наукових робіт, формування культури академічної доброчесності, підготовки до публічних виступів та розвитку навичок наукової комунікації. Дослідження сприяє формуванню сталої моделі наставництва літературних досліджень у сучасних освітніх умовах

Ключові слова: інтерпретаційна компетентність; академічна доброчесність; когнітивна поетика; порівняльні дослідження; міждисциплінарний підхід; наукова комунікація