Abstract

Autoethnographic study for building methodology of researching teenage literary self-educational courses upon analysis of one such course consisting of about 200 authors and titles. In the process of study, the following facts/ideas have been discovered:

a) it is worth to explore whether right of every child and teenager for self-education which is not controlled by any authorities, governments, and business entities could be included into Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Convention of the Rights of the Child;
b) active literary self-learning is possible even in the situation of social collapse and criminalized society; such factors as support of relatives/teachers, intellectual/behavioral segregation within school, and density of libraries within pedestrian accessibility may overpower social trends; however, presence of large home library and accessible public libraries is not enough to stimulate teenagers to read much;

c) topics, styles, and rhythm of literary self-studies may change abruptly upon the end of teenage years;

d) even in educated family where active reading is encouraged by parents/grandparents some cultural practices of reading are not transmitted between generations;

e) some self-learners invent their own cultural practices of reading; and some of these practices may be very rare;

f) avid readers may skip significant portions of easily available literary materials and concentrate at others;

g) discovery paths of literary materials for reading could change significantly during the latest 20 years upon widespread usage of Internet and mobile devices.

Introduction

In according to my personal opinion which may be easily supported by references to other researchers, literary self-educational course passed in teenage years may be one of the greatest boosters affecting all subsequent adult life of each particular person for the period of several tens years, and as a result of this, affecting global social life too. That’s why such courses passed by different people independently in different parts of the world require maximum attention of professional researchers.

When I was teenager, I have passed such self-educational course unconsciously (although probably, not unconsciously for my parents, grandparents, teachers, and librarians). It included about 200 authors and titles. Summary of this course has been written down just when I was 40+ years old. And after doing this, I came to the idea that all read materials can be easily classified into multiple categories intersecting with each other; so, it is possible to quantify multiple effects of the course just by quantifying amount of materials in each category. In this document, I would like to propose classification that may be reused by other researchers for exploring literary self-educational courses passed by teenagers and measuring effect of these courses on different aspects of personal and social life of readers after reaching adult age. Also, I’m explaining environmental factors and factual functioning of official educational system that can affect passing of such courses significantly, and may be easily manipulated by society to regulate amount of highly skilled professionals, and generally, amount of educated freely thinking people.

Some dimensions of proposed classification are based on ideas for social researches published at https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3364008 in 2019-2020th years.
To understand historical context of the passed course, it should be noted that I was born in 1978\textsuperscript{th} year.

**Methods**

All published results have been collected after analysis of compiled list of literary materials just by recalling them in memory during several months.

Many authors listed in appendixes were published inside “World Literature Library” book series well-known in Russia; so, I used online catalog of this series to recall some of listed items. To recall some titles/authors other public online catalogs were used.

 Literary review of this topic has not been performed yet; I’m not a professional researcher, and I have limited access to academic materials. Maybe, in the future editions of this document, more theoretical background will be added.

**Results**

Literary materials read in the course since getting 11 years old until getting 18 years old and used for building the proposed classification are listed in Appendix A and Appendix B at the end of this document. Only limited classification is applied in appendixes to minimize time expenses and to demonstrate how raw data obtained from respondents may look.

**General criteria that may be used to quantify literary materials**

- General library classification by genre, style, topic, epoch, and targeted modern age group. I guess, professional librarians may add more criteria.

- Whether particular literary material or author was influential and impressive for reader at the moment of reading or not.

- Whether particular literary material or author affected subsequent adult life directly (in according to opinion of reader after reaching adult age).

- Whether literary material has been read completely, or just started to be read. Several items listed in appendixes fit in this category (about 5).

- Whether fact of reading literary material is under question even for reader, because it is hard to recall it in memory. Several items listed in appendixes fit in this category (less than 5).

- Whether large amount of works of particular author (more than 5 works, for example) has been read. About 10-15 authors listed in appendixes fit in this category. Probably, few of them whose works were read in extremely large amount (several tens volumes) may be extracted into separate category (about 5 authors in the lists fit in this category).

- Whether some particular literary works or authors were actively searched or were found just by chance.
• Distribution of read literature by sub-courses. I suppose, materials listed in appendixes may be classified into 10-20 sub-courses.

• Emotional impression taken from literary material or author. The most part of listed materials has given only positive or neutral emotions, but several authors/books (less than 5) have left very negative and/or depressive emotional impression.

• Whether illustrations/photos were significant motivational factor for reading particular author and/or literary material.

• Whether literary works were read multiple times. In my case, significant part of materials were re-read 2-5 times. Even many of those that are listed in Appendix B.

• Whether some literary materials listed as single item represent several books in fact (less than 5 in my case) and whether some literary materials listed separately were read in single book with collection of works (less than 5 in my case). I’m not sure how these data may be useful for you, but sometimes, it is simpler to list literary materials in such way due to personal preferences.

• Whether read materials were discussed actively with relatives, friends, and teachers.

Sources of literary materials
In my case, sources were purchases made by father, by mother, and by myself (for money given by parents), magazine subscriptions made by both parents together, literary materials taken by me from 4 regularly visited public libraries (school library, district library, central city library, and university library), literary materials taken by me from 2 public libraries in recreational villages (it is informal translation of Russian terms дом отдыха, санаторий) visited with parents at summers, and literary materials found in Internet (Internet access became available just when my teenage years have ended). The most part of books purchased by parents was purchased before my birth. As you can guess, tastes and interests of parents may differ, and by purchasing different materials for child, they train different parts of her/his mind, which may have long-lasting effect. It is supposed that such sources as other relatives, friends, classmates, and teachers may be considered too, although in my case they were absent.

It should be noted that presence of large home library and accessible public libraries is not enough to push child into the process of active reading, as I can see by my siblings. It is supposed that in addition to having large home library, the child should have some unsatisfied necessities of so-called “moderate intensity”, both material and emotional that can be compensated partially through reading. It is supposed that if unsatisfied necessities are too large and serious, or vice versa, too small, then active reading cannot be used as substitution of desired objects and emotions.

Age-related classification
Reading of several of the listed authors (about 5-10) has been started much earlier than 11 years old (one was started at 7 years old), and few works (about 5) were read (however, mainly, without being
completed) in the period since getting 18 years old till 30 years old. But I suppose, these authors and works must be considered as parts of teenage course too, because authors that were started earlier than 11 years old were read until getting about 15 years old, and works read after getting 18 years old were read by inertia. So, we may add the following temporal classification of read materials specifying when each particular author/work was read: pre-teenage years (before 11), early teenage years (11-13), mid-teenage years (14-16), late teenage years (17-18), post-teenage years (after 18 and up to 30, in case if reader feels that materials were read by inertia and they are not numerous).

**Inclusion of literary materials in official school curriculum**

It is obvious, that in spite of including some material or author in official school curriculum, real process of reading may happen outside of school. Also, it should be noted that in Russian high schools of 1980’s and 1990’s, the accent in studies was made at learning/teaching mathematics and natural sciences, humanities were taught in rather negligible way; cheating at exams was considered as widespread norm; those students who did not want to read large fiction materials included into official literary curriculum could purchase easily in street book shops the collections of outlines of all novels taking just several pages each, and even ready essays that could be submitted at exams. That’s why in my case, it is reasonable to consider official school literary curriculum as the part of self-studies.

**Absorbing literary materials within cultural practices of reading**

My father told me that when he was a kid, he read aloud large books (one Jules Verne’s novel was mentioned by him) for his mother and aunt at evenings. (They lived in a tiny provincial conservative town, there were not many opportunities to spend free time.) I don’t know who came to idea of doing this – he, his mother or aunt (both were working class women), or it was recommendation of school teachers – but I guess, if this cultural practice has been used in family, then authors/works read in such way may be classified in a separate group. In my case, such practice was completely absent. However, I invented by myself two other cultural practices of reading. The first was reading books at school lessons (unrelated school lessons, for example, Shakespeare’s works at geometry lessons). I consider it as cultural practice, because I have found later in Internet that many people did it in Russia (although in my class I was the only one). The most part of teachers in Russian schools of that historical period did not care much about such reading practice, especially if student had top grades in taught subject. The second practice was reading books at dinner at home, with eating simultaneously. I have seen this practice used by another person only once in my life, when I met one young French lady in my travel to Madagascar.

**Perception of objectivity of literary materials**

Due to economical, geographical, and family circumstances, my teenage and youth explorations of social and natural worlds biased towards obtaining information from fiction literature and art works; round-the-world travels have been started in adult age only, when I had already extensive
background in studies of all kinds of literature and arts (it should be noted that I was semi-professional creative writer by this time). As a result of this situation, my travels, and generally, my life were directed to exploring the world outside of content of literary and art works.

After summarizing all this experience, I can say that in my personal opinion no more than 10%-20% of the world can be known from fiction literature and art works, no more than 30%-40% can be known from popular science books, travel blogs and mass news articles in magazines or Internet, and no more than 30%-40% can be known from scientific monographs and publications. Every of these sources either skips or distorts significant portions of reality. Or just goes several years (or more) behind the reality. Obviously, this observation is very subjective. But it gives us one more dimension for quantifying literary materials passed in self-educational courses: what is personal opinion of teenage reader on how objective are the read literary materials in relation to the modern world surrounding her/him?

**Skipped topics, genres, and periods**

The most part (“the most” considering repeated reading) of “serious” fiction literary materials listed in appendixes that I have explored outside of school program either has been written more than 100 years ago (even by the time of reading) or contains information about societies from more ancient periods of history. Why I avoided reading more modern authors and reading materials about more recent periods of history? Just because the history of the whole 20th century looked for me like crazy jumps performed by human civilization from one side to another. That’s why I did not feel strong connection between characters and ideas expressed in the literature of 20th century and modern reality. In contrast to this, all literature written prior to 20th century looked as sequential development of ideas for several thousands years. In other words, I did not feel practical necessity to read the most part of literature written in 20th century. I’m not sure whether it is my personal particularity (caused by growing up in 1990’s in the middle of Russia) or common trend. However, it gives us two more dimensions for classifying literary materials: does reader skip some historical periods, genres, or topics with a purpose? does reader skip some historical periods, genres, or topics due to difficulties in understanding?

**Languages**

About 99% of materials listed in appendixes have been read by me in Russian language, remaining part was read in Tatar language. It includes all ancient novels, dramas, and epic literature from multiple countries that may sound very archaic for native speakers of languages used by authors of these works. For me, all this looked like historical works written by modern Russian-speaking authors. Definitely, it changed my attitude to these literary materials significantly, simplified reading, and allowed deeper immersion in text. So, classification on the basis of languages of texts and archaism levels of these languages may be also applicable.
Discovery paths

It may be good idea to introduce into research such concept as *discovery path*. In my case, it was almost absent, the search of literature has been performed just physically in home library, in other libraries, and in paper catalogs of other libraries. But in the modern world, presence of multiple Internet resources and widespread usage of mobile devices may allow teenage readers to construct in their heads very long and complex discovery paths in the process of searching literature. So, the materials found by very long and complex discovery paths may be classified into separate group.

Behavior models

Some teenage readers could use authors and characters from the read literary materials as behaviour models. In my case, such phenomenon was present too (about 30 models of 11 types were taken) but on sub-conscious level only and partially only, because I’m too reasonable person and the most part of read materials was too old/outrated even by 1980’s and 1990’s. The following types of models were taken from the read literary materials: *writer, boy exploring the world, explorer of wild nature, wanderer, wildman, young man exploring the world, artist, antisocial person, thinker, ecologist, entrepreneur.*

Literary materials with explicit sexual content

You may see in appendixes that some read materials like “Encyclopedia of World Arts History”, “Ethnographic Encyclopedia”, and works of Apuleius, Boccaccio, Casanova, de Sade, Welsh contain a lot of sexological, erotic, or pornographic stuff. That’s why classification on the basis of presence of explicit sexual content may be also needed. Besides materials with explicit sexual content, there may be literary works that highlight emotional parts of sexual life deeply, and in some conservative families living far from large cities, such literary works may be the only or main source of information on this topic for kids, and that’s why they may be classified separately. The latter idea is based on occasional communication with my mother about Gustave Flaubert’s works; however, I did not read this author by myself and did not communicate with my mother much about this. Also, I guess that some teenage readers may use authors and characters from the read literary materials as sex symbols; in my case, such phenomenon was almost absent; the only sex symbols that I have obtained from literature are general types of *female exploring wild nature* (without concentrating at images/names of particular personalities) and *exotic female warrior*. But I never used these symbols in sexual fantasies, they were purely psychological sex symbols.

Environmental factors affecting reader in the process of passing self-educational course

For better understanding the process of reading large amounts of literary materials you may consider climatic and social environments which may affect reading habits significantly.

In my teenage years, I lived in Kazan city in Russia where climate is rather harsh, about one third of year staying outdoors is difficult because of heavy rains or severe frosts, and my relatives were not
hikers at all. In 1980’s, teenage crime flourished in the city, each district was controlled by some gang, and violent clashes happened regularly. In 1990’s the situation calmed down gradually, but general social environment was still hostile, and nobody was surprised that kid like me prefers to stay almost all time at home or in libraries. To illustrate hostility of environment even in the mid of 1990’s, I can provide one simple example: I lived with parents in a typical giant house with multiple apartments, the house was located in rather good neighborhood by standards of those times, when significant part of Kazan population lived in favela-style wooden barracks; but periodically, at late night, in public areas of the house in several steps from my apartment door, it was possible to meet drug consumers performing injections, used syringes could be found in dark corners at morning.

Global sexual revolution has reached the city in 1990’s, it happened simultaneously with the peak of informational TV propaganda about risks of getting HIV; this situation together with somewhat conservative attitudes of my parents explains why I preferred to sublimate my sexual impulses into literary self-learning instead of experimenting with neighbor ladies.

**Official educational system passed by self-educating reader**

Also, maximum attention should be paid to educational system the teenage reader is passing through in the process of self-studies.

In Russia of 1980’s and 1990’s, 10-year educational program was used, kids started schooling after getting 7 years old and graduated after getting 16 years old. Then, the most part of graduates continued studies in local technical universities with rather weak admission criteria (and still co-habited with parents).

Usage of electronic devices in the process of studies was almost absent outside of the largest cities. Starting from about getting 10 years old, the students were actively regrouped by teachers between school classes in according to their intellectual abilities, behavior, and financial opportunities of parents. (You should understand that schools were underfinanced at those times and the whole school system was corrupted heavily through so-called *financial assistance* that was gathered from parents regularly.) As a result of such segregation of students, you could find in every ordinary school rather strict differences between school classes in spite of the fact that all students lived in the same neighborhood; some classes could be composed almost completely of teenage gangsters and kids with underdeveloped intellectual abilities, and in parallel classes you could find students like me who put a lot of efforts into studies and self-studies. However, it is necessary to highlight again the fact that segregation was not intellectual, it was also behavioral and financial; so, speaking shortly, you could be beaten in any class. If such approach to segregating teenagers (including those who were members of gangs) looks strange for you, you should understand that I lived in Central Asian part of Russia (in Tatarstan), where authority of teachers, and generally, authority of the state officials was respected by all parts of the society; it explains why segregation was followed in some or another way even at breaks between lessons. I’m not sure how it worked and whether it was practiced in other parts of Russia having mainly Slavic population. However, probably, creation of comfortable environment for studies and self-studies even in standard schools with teenage gangs was widespread educational approach in Russia of that historical period as a result of Cold War.
when many cheap professionals were needed; but it is just my guess, I did not explore this topic in literature.

**Discussion**

It is supposed that provided approach to quantification of literary self-educational courses may help pedagogues, child/teenage psychologists, and parents to implement better strategies for educating children and pushing social progress.

At the same time, it is obvious that deep understanding of neurophysiological and social effects of teenage self-educational courses (discovered after researching several hundreds of such courses, like mine) may allow totalitarian, criminalized, and manipulative governments and particular representatives of authorities to press down societies and individuals to keep existing hostile social order. (I’m not talking about Russia; due to geopolitical situation of Russia, educational system is very specific there, and in the times when I was teenager self-education was encouraged, as I wrote above.) It is supposed that simple psychological interventions performed through official educational system may decrease effect of self-educational literary courses easily. That’s why in deeper research of this topic, it is recommended to find solutions to counteract such interventions on family level and on personal level. Basing on my personal experience described above, it is possible to guess several educational practices that may be very harmful to deep immersion in text which is required to pass really large and serious courses:

- active usage of tablets in the process of learning (in addition to altering reading practices, it gives too high stress to eyes);
- recomposition of students between classes in such way to eliminate opportunities for and necessity in intellectual leadership; for example, to include in every class several members of teenage gangs or physically developed teenagers having low grades.

I’m not sure about current trends in government control over self-education of teenagers in different countries around the world, this topic requires active review of literature and interviewing people from multiple locations. (You should understand that laws, regulations, traditions, practical application of all this to daily life, and daily life by itself may vary and even contradict each other significantly between regions and social strata of every particular country.) But if such trends really exist and grow, it is worth to explore whether right of every child and teenager for self-education which is not controlled by any authorities, governments, and business entities could be included into Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Convention of the Rights of the Child. Because this right may be crucial for social progress in the modern aging society.

(Please, check appendixes with literary materials used for this research on the following 2 pages.)
The term *medieval* used further includes the period since 5th up to 18th century AD. The term *ancient* includes the period before 5th century AD. Square brackets mean forgotten title and/or author.

**Appendix A – The most influential authors read in the course**

| Classic Literature | Science and Popular Science | Science Fiction |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| Alexandre Dumas    | Bernhard Grzimek             | Andre Norton    |
| Anton Chekhov      | Dinah Moché                  | Clifford D. Simak|
| Arthur Conan Doyle | Gerald Durrell               | Harry Harrison  |
| Charles Dickens    | Jane Goodall                 | Ivan Efremov    |
| Edgar Allan Poe    | Joy Adamson                  | J.-H. Rosny aîné|
| Emily Dickinson    | Thor Heyerdahl               | Paul Anderson   |
| Ernest Hemingway   |                             | Vladimir Obruchev|
| Henryk Sienkiewicz |                             |                 |
| Herman Melville    |                             |                 |
| Honoré de Balzac   |                             |                 |
| Irving Stone       |                             |                 |
| Jack London        |                             |                 |
| Jules Verne        |                             |                 |
| Mario Pazo         |                             |                 |
| Mark Twain         |                             |                 |
| Pablo Neruda       |                             |                 |
| Rafael Sabatini    |                             |                 |
| Stendhal           |                             |                 |
| Thomas Mayne Reid  |                             |                 |
| Walt Whitman       |                             |                 |
| Washington Irving  |                             |                 |

**Ancient and Medieval World Literature**

- Arabic fairy tales
- Chinese medieval stories
- Ferdowsi (Shahnameh)
- French medieval playwrights
- Indian epic stories
- Japanese medieval poetry
- Korean medieval stories
- Scandinavian epic stories
- Spanish medieval playwrights
- William Shakespeare

**Appendix B – Other authors, books, and literary materials read in the course**

| Classic Literature | Ancient and Medieval World Literature | Science and Popular Science |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Agatha Christie    | African fairy tales                   | [About 5 monthly magazines about popular science and world news] |
| Anne et Serge Golon| Ancient Greek dramas                  | [Advertisement in Western economics] |
| Alphonse Daudet    | Ancient Greek mythology               | [Analysis of Quran]         |
| Antoine de Saint-Exupéry | Apuleius                       | [Autobiography of one French speleologist] |
| Arkady Gaidar     | Arabic medieval poetry                | [Biography of Alexander the Great (of Macedon)] |
| Émile Zola        | Beowulf                               | [Biography of Benvenuto Cellini] |
| Erle Stanley Gardner | Blaise Pascal                   | [Biography of Marie Antoinette] |
| Ethel Lilian Voynich | Central Asian parables              | [Biography of Nicholas Miklouho-Maclay] |
| Friedrich Schiller | Chinese medieval poetry              | Carlos Castaneda           |
| George Bernard Shaw | Daniel Defoe                        | Christopher Columbus’ diaries |
| George Gordon Byron | Dante Alighieri                    | David Livingstone’s diaries |
| George Sand       | Denis Diderot                         | [Ecology and Wildlife Protection] |
| Gottfried Keller  | European medieval poetry             | “Encyclopedia of World Arts |
| Guy de Maupassant | European medieval stories            |                             |
| Heinrich Heine    | François de La Rochefoucauld         |                             |
| Henrik Ibsen      | François Rabelais                    |                             |
| Irvine Welsh      | Geoffrey Chaucer                     |                             |
| James Fenimore Cooper |                             |                             |
Russian/Soviet Literature (passed in school studies)

Alexander Fadeyev
Alexander Griboyedov
Alexander Ostrovsky
Alexander Pushkin
Aleksandr Blok
Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn
Aleksey Tolstoy
Ancient Russian epos
Anna Akhmatova
Boris Pasternak
Boris Polevoy
Fyodor Dostoyevsky
Fyodor Tyutchev
Gabdulla Tuqay
Ilya Ilf and Yevgeny Petrov
Ivan Bunin
Ivan Goncharov
Ivan Turgenev
Konstantin Paustovsky
Konstantin Simonov
Leo Tolstoy
Maxim Gorky
Mikhail Bulgakov
Mikhail Lermontov
Mikhail Prishvin
Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin
Nikolai Gogol
Nikolai Leskov
Nikolai Ostrovsky
Nikolay Chernyshevsky
Nikolay Nekrasov
Poets of the Silver Age (those
who are not listed here)
Sergei Yesenin
Tatar classic prose and poetry
Venedikt Yerofeyev
Vladimir Korolenko
Vladimir Mayakovskyy

Science Fiction

Aldous Huxley
Alexander Belyaev
Arthur C. Clarke
[Collection of stories from US
science fiction writers]
Daniel Keyes
Herbert George Wells
Isaac Asimov
John Wyndham
Kir Bulychev
[One book of some French
science fiction writer]
Ray Bradbury
Robert A. Heinlein
Roger Zelazny
Stanisław Lem