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Abstract

This article explores innovative approaches to enhancing students' philological competence and literary cognition through the use of non-linear and multilayered narrative structures. Focusing on Christopher Priest's *The Prestige* as an experimental text, the study introduces a pedagogical method involving fragmented dialogue and delayed contextualization. Throughout the course, students engaged with ambiguous excerpts lacking full narrative clarity, encouraging critical discussion, interpretive reasoning, and hypothesis-building. Only at the conclusion of the novel were they provided with a key phrase that clarified prior ambiguities and narrative gaps. This process fostered deeper engagement with language, subtext, and narrative mechanics, thereby cultivating advanced skills in textual analysis, intertextual awareness, and literary inference. The findings suggest that narrative experimentation can serve as a powerful tool in philological education, prompting students to navigate linguistic uncertainty and develop a more nuanced, reflective reading practice. The article concludes with recommendations for integrating such techniques into broader curricula aimed at developing interpretive sophistication and textual sensitivity.

Key words: *philological competence, literary cognition, non-linear narrative, multilayered narrative, fragmented dialogue, textual analysis, interpretive reasoning, subtext.*

Аннотация

В статье рассматриваются инновационные подходы к повышению филологической компетентности и развитию литературного познания студентов через использование нелинейных и многослойных повествовательных структур. На примере романа Кристофера Приста «Престиж» в качестве экспериментального текста в исследовании представлен педагогический метод, включающий фрагментарный диалог и отсроченную контекстуализацию. На протяжении всего курса студенты работали с неоднозначными фрагментами, лишенными полной ясности повествования, поощряя критические дискуссии,

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интерпретационные рассуждения и построение гипотез. Только в конце романа им сообщалась ключевая фраза, которая проясняла предыдущие двусмысленности и пробелы в повествовании. Этот процесс способствовал более глубокому взаимодействию с языком, подтекстом и механикой повествования, тем самым развивая навыки текстового анализа, интертекстуальной осведомленности и литературных умозаключений. Полученные результаты свидетельствуют о том, что нарративные эксперименты могут служить мощным инструментом филологического образования, побуждая студентов преодолевать языковую неопределенность и развивать более тонкую, рефлексивную практику чтения. В заключение статьи даются рекомендации по включению подобных техник в более широкие учебные программы, направленные на развитие интерпретационной сложности и текстовой чувствительности.

Ключевые слова: *филологическая компетенция, литературное познание, нелинейное повествование, многослойное повествование, фрагментарный диалог, текстуальный анализ, интерпретационное рассуждение, подтекст.*

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqola xronologik ketma-ket bo'lmagan va ko'p qatlamli hikoya tuzilmalaridan foydalanish orqali talabalarning filologik kompetensiyasi va adabiy bilimni oshirishning innovatsion yondashuvlarini o'rganadi. Tajriba matni sifatida Kristofer Pristning "Pristij" asari tanlandi, tadqiqot dialog parchalari va xronologik tartibga bo'ysunmagan kontekstualizatsiyani o'z ichiga olgan pedagogik usulni taqdim etadi. Kurs davomida talabalarga tanqidiy munozarani, sharhlarni va gipoteza yaratishni bosh maqsad qilib belgilandi; dag'al, noaniq matn parchalari bilan shug'ullanishdi. Faqat romanning oxirida ularga oldingi noaniqliklar va hikoya bo'shliqlarini aniqlaydigan asosiy ibora berildi. Bu jarayon til, subtekst va hikoya mexanikasi bilan chuqurroq shug'ullanishga yordam berdi va shu bilan matnni tahlil qilish, matnlararo xabardorlik va adabiy xulosa chiqarish bo'yicha ilg'or ko'nikmalarni rivojlantirdi. Topilmalar shuni ko'rsatadiki, hikoya eksperimenti filologik ta'limda kuchli vosita bo'lib xizmat qilishi mumkin, bu talabalarni lingvistik dag'allikni boshqarishga va o'qish amaliyotini rivojlantirishga undaydi. Maqolaning yakuni bo'yicha bunday usullarni talqin qilishning murakkabligi va matn sezgirligini rivojlantirishga qaratilgan kengroq o'quv dasturlariga integratsiya qilish bo'yicha tavsiyalar berilgan.

Kalit so'zlar: *filologik kompetensiya, adabiy bilim, noxronologik hikoya, ko'p qatlamli hikoya, dialog parchalari, matn tahlili, interpretiv fikrlash, subtekst.*

Introduction

In the contemporary landscape of philological education, there is a growing need for innovative methodologies that respond to the complexity of modern literary texts and the evolving cognitive capacities of students. The aim of this study is to enhance students' philological competence and literary cognition through experimental engagement with non-linear and multilayered narrative structures. By shifting away from traditional linear reading and interpretive models, this research introduces a narrative-based pedagogical framework that places vagueness (hiding the answers to "why?" and "how?" questions from the readers, however a key word to each question is provided at the end of the narrative), fragmentation, and interpretive suspense at the centre of literary learning. The primary task of this research is to explore how carefully selected narrative gaps and deferred contextualization—key features in postmodern storytelling—can activate deeper cognitive and linguistic engagement in students. Through structured classroom experiments using Christopher

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Priest's novel *The Prestige*, students were encouraged to form and refine interpretive hypotheses based on incomplete or ambiguous textual data, thereby cultivating advanced skills in analysis, reflection, and inference.

The actuality of this study lies in the increasing relevance of postmodern and metafictional texts in both literary culture and academic syllabi. As students encounter more complex narrative formats across genres and media, it becomes essential to equip them with interpretive strategies suited to these challenges. The novelty of the research is grounded in its integration of narrative experimentation as a deliberate pedagogical tool, rather than simply as an aesthetic feature of literature. While many studies have examined the literary features of non-linear narratives, few have focused on their instructional potential within the philological domain.

This research was conducted at the undergraduate level within the framework of a philology and literature course. The participants were third- and fourth-year university students majoring in English philology. Their level of linguistic and literary training enabled them to engage critically with the complexities of postmodern narrative forms. The study is positioned within current trends in higher education that emphasize student-centred learning, cognitive development through literary interpretation, and interdisciplinary methods in philological instruction.¹

Scholars have long recognized the cognitive and cultural value of narrative engagement in language and literature education.² In recent years, the rise of narrative complexity in contemporary fiction has prompted educators to explore how these texts can be used to foster metacognitive awareness and analytical competence in students.³ The use of narrative gaps and ambiguous dialogue, as employed in this study, draws from the theory of "gapped narration" and "reader participation"⁴, where meaning is not given but constructed through interpretive effort. These theories support the design of this pedagogical experiment, positioning it within a broader academic context of interpretive and reader-response approaches to literary education.

The results of this research reveal clear benefits in applying narrative experimentation as a teaching tool for philological development. Students demonstrated improved abilities in interpreting subtext, recognizing narrative structures, and engaging in hypothesis-driven reading.⁵ By encountering vagueness and narrative fragmentation early in the reading process, they were required to rely on textual evidence, contextual reasoning, and collaborative discussion to make sense of the material—skills that are essential to philological inquiry.⁶

Moreover, the delayed introduction of a clarifying key phrase at the end of the novel encouraged students to retroactively revise their interpretations, thereby simulating the recursive nature of academic reading.⁷ This not only deepened their understanding of *The Prestige* but also sensitized them to the layered architecture of literary texts in general. The pedagogical method employed in this

¹ Bruner, J. (1996). *The Culture of Education*. Harvard University Press.

² Nünning, A. (2003). "Narratology or Narratologies? Taking Stock of Recent Developments, Critique and Modest Proposals for Future Uses of Narratology." In *What is Narratology?*, eds. Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller, De Gruyter.

³ Alber, J., & Heinze, R. (2011). *Unnatural Narratives – Unnatural Narratology*. De Gruyter.

⁴ Iser, W. (1978). *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

⁵ Richardson, B. (2006). *Unnatural Voices: Extreme Narration in Modern and Contemporary Fiction*. Ohio State University Press.

⁶ Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Harvard University Press.

⁷ Kearney, R. (2002). *On Stories*. Routledge.

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study proved effective in shifting students from passive consumption to active co-construction of literary meaning.

The research suggests that narrative experimentation enhances not only linguistic and literary competence, but also metacognitive awareness and interpretive agility. These competencies are critical for philology students who must navigate increasingly complex texts across historical periods, genres, and theoretical frameworks. Therefore, the results offer a valuable contribution to curriculum design in literary education and highlight the potential for interdisciplinary teaching strategies grounded in narrative theory.

Methods

The central text selected for the empirical investigation was Christopher Priest's novel "The Prestige". This work was chosen due to its rich narrative complexity, dual-structure plot, and layers of metafiction and symbolism. These features provide fertile ground for philological analysis, offering opportunities for students to engage with a variety of narrative voices, ambiguous timelines, intertextual allusions, and genre conventions. Such analytical tasks stimulate not only linguistic awareness but also the development of literary and cultural interpretive skills.

In total, 23 students participated in the study, aged between 20 and 23 years. The group included 15 female and 8 male students, all of whom had completed foundational coursework in English Linguistics, Literary History, and Translation Studies. The participants were proficient in English at B2–C1 levels according to the CEFR, which enabled them to engage with authentic literary texts in the target language without the need for extensive simplification. Their academic preparation and linguistic ability ensured that the focus of the analysis could remain on interpretive depth rather than language comprehension alone.

The study was conducted over a 6-week period during the spring semester, with activities integrated into the standard curriculum. Sessions took place twice a week in a seminar-style classroom environment. Each session lasted 90 minutes and included text-based discussion, guided interpretation exercises, group work, and reflective tasks. Digital tools (e.g., collaborative Google docs, virtual discussion forums, and video excerpts from film adaptations) were occasionally used to supplement traditional classroom instruction and enhance multimodal learning.

The setting was designed to foster an immersive, dialogic learning environment where students could articulate their interpretations, challenge each other's perspectives, and collaborate in meaning-making. Each session was audio recorded with prior consent to allow for post-session analysis of communicative interactions and discursive patterns.

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the study. Participants were informed about the aims, procedures, and potential benefits of the research, and written consent was obtained for the use of their anonymous responses, essays, and discussions. Participation had no impact on students' official grades, and all contributions were treated confidentially. The research design received approval from the university's ethics committee.

Research phases and timeline

To assess the impact of literary immersion on the formation of philological competence, the empirical study was structured into five distinct phases over a period of six weeks. Each phase was aligned with specific objectives and methodological principles aimed at facilitating and measuring students' development in interpretive, linguistic, and communicative skills.

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Phase 1 – Pre-analysis survey and diagnostic tasks

Week 1:

Objective: to measure students' initial levels of literary interpretation and linguistic awareness.

Activities: a diagnostic reading comprehension task (short excerpt from the prestige), a pre-survey with Likert-scale self-assessments (e.g., "I can analyse narrative structure confidently"), and one open-ended reflective question.

Tools: google forms survey; rubric-based scoring.

Phase 2 – Guided literary seminars

Weeks 2–4

Objective: to develop core philological competencies through scaffolded analysis of "The Prestige".

Activities: detailed textual breakdowns focusing on narrative voice, temporal shifts, symbolism, cultural context, and metafictional elements. Weekly written reflections (150–200 words).

Group discussions based on questions such as: "What is the role of ambiguity in Borden's narration?" And "How does the structure reflect thematic dualism?"

Tools: printed texts, digital annotation tools, multimedia support (film clips for contrast).

Phase 3 – Collaborative interpretation and role-based analysis

Week 4

Objective: to enhance dialogic competence, peer-learning, and applied literary theory.

Activities: students divided into 4 groups (narratological, psychoanalytic, structuralist, postmodernist). Each group presented an interpretive framework based on selected scenes from the novel.

Outcome: each group produced a mini-presentation and shared peer feedback.

Phase 4 – post-analysis survey and reflective assessment

Week 5

Objective: to evaluate the perceived and demonstrated growth in competence.

Activities: post-survey using same self-assessment items from phase 1; students wrote a reflective journal entry about their learning trajectory and how their view of literary analysis had evolved.

Phase 5 – final essay and oral presentation

Week 6

Objective: to synthesize students' interpretive development in a formal context.

Activities: students submitted a 900–1200 word critical essay (topic selected from a list of thematic prompts), followed by a 5-minute oral presentation.

Assessment: graded using a detailed rubric focusing on argumentation, linguistic clarity, critical insight, and literary knowledge.

Results

A key instrument for competence assessment was an analytical rubric applied to student essays and presentations. The rubric assessed the following dimensions:

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Competency Area	Criteria	Max Score
Textual interpretation	Depth of literary insight, identification of subtext, symbolism	10
Linguistic expression	Accuracy, coherence, sophistication of academic language	10
Cultural contextualization	Integration of historical, sociocultural references	10
Critical and original thinking	Argument originality, creativity in analysis	10
Presentation & discourse skills	Clarity, engagement, and use of philological terminology	10

50 points Rubric results were visualized using box plots to highlight the distribution of scores before and after the instructional intervention.

Pre- and post-project questionnaires

Students completed Likert-scale questionnaires both before and after the study to gauge self-perceived competence levels across several domains. Sample statements included:

I feel confident interpreting postmodern literary texts.

I can connect linguistic features to cultural context in a text.

I can express complex literary ideas in academic English.

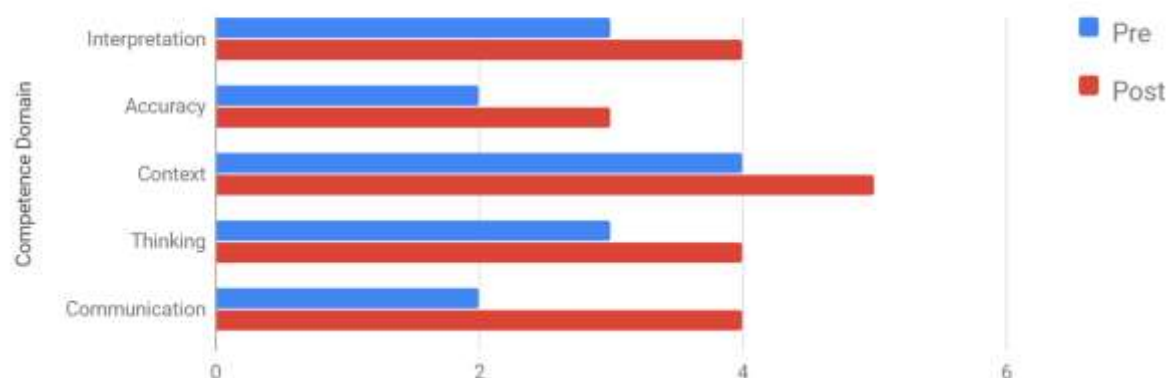
Each statement was rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Results were averaged and compared:

Competence domain	Pre-average score	Post-average score	% improvement
Literary interpretation	3.1	4.3	+38.7%
Linguistic accuracy	3.4	4.1	+20.6%
Cultural context awareness	2.9	4.2	+44.8%
Critical thinking	3.0	4.4	+46.7%
Academic communication	3.2	4.5	+40.6%

Diagram: pre/post competence scores

Self-Perceived Competence Before and After Project

Score (1 to 5)



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Y-Axis: Score (1 to 5)

X-Axis: Competence domain (interpretation, accuracy, context, thinking, communication)

Final essay submission: 22 students (96%);

Oral presentation delivered: 21 students (91%);

Increase in self-reported interpretive confidence (Likert scale avg.): from 3.1 → 4.4 out of 5;

Students reporting improved literary analysis skills: 87% (20/23).

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the pedagogical potential of non-linear, multilayered narratives in the development of students' philological competence. By introducing ambiguity through fragmented dialogues and postponing narrative resolution, students were pushed beyond surface-level reading into deeper textual engagement. This method created an interpretive environment that mirrors real-world literary scholarship, where meaning is often uncertain, contextual, and open to negotiation. The active participation required of students during discussion phases—when textual clarity was deliberately withheld—fostered metacognitive awareness. Students had to articulate, defend, and often revise their interpretations, thereby internalizing core skills of philological inquiry such as textual justification, hypothesis testing, and inferential reading. These outcomes align with Iser's (1978) theory of the "implied reader," wherein meaning emerges through interaction between reader and text, particularly when gaps and silences are present.

The deliberate structuring of *The Prestige* also served as an effective vehicle for exploring how narrative design can reflect and shape cognition. In this context, Priest's novel did more than provide literary content—it functioned as a methodological tool, enabling students to experience the very narrative strategies they were learning to analyze.

Importantly, the results suggest that such experimentation not only aids in reading comprehension but also transforms the classroom into a space of discovery, dialogue, and intellectual risk-taking. This stands in contrast to more traditional philological instruction, which may rely on predefined interpretations and linear text progression. While this method requires more preparation and guidance from the instructor, the cognitive and interpretive gains justify the effort.

Moreover, this study contributes to the growing body of literature emphasizing the value of uncertainty, ambiguity, and reader agency in literary education. It advocates for a shift from transmission-based learning to a more exploratory, reflective, and dynamic model of literary engagement.

Conclusion

The integration of such experimental methods into the philology curriculum offers a powerful alternative to traditional models of instruction. It encourages students to become active participants in meaning-making, fosters collaborative learning through discussion, and cultivates habits of thought essential to advanced literary study. As contemporary literature continues to challenge linear forms and fixed interpretations, philological education must adapt accordingly.

Future research may expand this approach to different genres, cultural contexts, or linguistic backgrounds to test its broader applicability. Nevertheless, the results of this study provide strong evidence for the effectiveness of narrative experimentation as both a literary and instructional tool, opening new pathways for the development of philological competence in the modern classroom.

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