

## Using Themes and Topics in Contemporary Kazakh Short Fiction: Pedagogical Implications

Orken IMANGALI<sup>1</sup>, Rakymberdi ZHETIBAY<sup>2</sup>,  
Serik ASSYLBEKULY<sup>3</sup>, Anar KASSYMBEKOVA<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University, Almaty, KAZAKHSTAN  
[orken.007@mail.ru](mailto:orken.007@mail.ru)

ORCID: 0000-0001-7142-7982

<sup>2</sup> Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University, Almaty, KAZAKHSTAN  
[raximberdi777@mail.ru](mailto:raximberdi777@mail.ru)

ORCID: 0000-0003-1582-9973

<sup>3</sup> Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University, Almaty, KAZAKHSTAN  
[serik051@mail.ru](mailto:serik051@mail.ru)

ORCID: 0000-0003-3693-9098

<sup>4</sup> Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University, Almaty, KAZAKHSTAN  
[akasyimbekova@list.ru](mailto:akasyimbekova@list.ru)

ORCID: 0000-0002-6201-1990

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**Abstract:** The years of independence have changed various social, political, and literary realities in Kazakhstan, which has affected the thematic and stylistic expressions of Kazakh writers. Thus, research should identify the ideological, social, and thematic features of modern literary writing produced during the years of independence. In particular, social symbolism's role in transmitting national ideals should be scrutinized simply because such sentiments have various literature, cultural, and educational repercussions. Hence, this paper distinguishes the main issues and ideas revealed in post-independence fiction to give a diachronic analysis of the thematic scope of modern Kazakh literature. Following this, this study discusses the themes and topics found in post-independence Kazakh short fiction to shed light on how these texts can be used pedagogically.

### Anahtar Sözcükler:

Kazak edebiyatı,  
edebi dil,  
değişibilim,  
edebiyat öğretimi,  
pedagojik  
uygulamalar

**Çağdaş Kazak Kısa Romanında Tema ve Konuların Kullanımı: Pedagojik Uygulamalar**

**Özet:** Bağımsızlık yılları Kazakistan'da çeşitli sosyal, politik ve edebi gerçekleri değiştirmiş, bu da Kazak yazarların tematik ve deyişbilimsel anlatımlarını etkilemiştir. Bu nedenle araştırma, bağımsızlık yıllarında üretilen modern edebi yazının ideolojik, sosyal ve tematik özelliklerini belirlemelidir. Özellikle ulusal ideallerin aktarımında sosyal sembolizmin rolü dikkatle incelenmelidir çünkü bu tür duyguların çeşitli edebiyat, kültür ve eğitim yansımaları vardır. Dolayısıyla bu makale, modern Kazak edebiyatının tematik kapsamının artzamanlı bir analizini vermek için bağımsızlık sonrası kurguda ortaya çıkan ana konuları ve fikirleri birbirinden ayırmaktadır. Bunu takiben, bu çalışma bağımsızlık sonrası Kazak öykülerinde bulunan tema ve başlıkları incelerken bunların pedagojik kullanımları hakkında önerilerde bulunmaktadır.

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## 1. Introduction

Independent Kazakh literature has been developed in all genres. It occupies a special place in people's spiritual lives with its thematic and content depth, literary and aesthetic power, exceptional attention to human nature, and the expression of the country's inner world's subtleties. Modern Kazakh literature results from creative work in the system of national and world literary processes, including the genre of stories. Satilkhanova (2019) considers that literary language fulfills its function as a spiritual need for humanity. In turn, it is influenced by changes and innovations in world literature and literary pursuits. Representatives of the literature in the independence years tried to reveal some restricted topics, such as social discord, religion, illiteracy, social problems, ignorance, and unjust rules of life (Karimova *et al.*, 2023). A modern reader needs to create new ways of depicting well-known situations by resorting to unprecedented literary approaches (Aubakirova *et al.*, 2024; Orakova *et al.*, 2024; Yeleussiz, 2024;).

It is true that in the first years of independence, Kazakh literature was stagnant. Of course, there were leading representatives during these periods. However, their stories were also somewhat delayed. Only writers passionate about true innovation and freedom could sustain their growth during this period. Among the modern prose works written over the last twenty years, the story genre's literary styles and thematic scope are very complex. Seisembay (2018) argues that for many Kazakh writers, independence gave them a feeling of freedom, which gave birth to the flourishing of various character types and subject matters included in fiction.

The thematic groups and ideas have been renewed and rejuvenated in terms of variety and form. Most of the stories desire to follow the story and reveal the changes and phenomena in the mind to penetrate the inner soul of man. Of course, innovation, the desire to improve the type and writing styles, the search for new fields, various experiments, and creative pursuits do not fall into the traditions but tend to enrich those traditions.

## 2. Literature Review

Azizova *et al.* (2015) stated the fact that “there is a tendency of authors to comprehend what is happening in the dramatic historical and cultural context of the era and talk about the present day within the chosen discourse” (p. 1341). Authors such as Murtaza, Zhumadilov, Nurzhekeevich, Magauin, Nurmagambetov, Tyumenbai, and Tarazi have significantly improved the literary level of modern Kazakh stories. The next wave of literature lingered in this period. After all, the previous generation was waiting for some innovations. Moreover, the previous generation has had some success. Common themes raised by the writers who came to literature during the Soviet era were the cruelty and deceit of the previous government, some cultural themes, and some hardships of people in the early stages of independence. However, at the heart of all, there was opposition and hatred toward the previous government, Tsarist Russia.

Rakymzhan *et al.* (2022) describe the intersection between philosophy and literature by discussing this relationship through such keywords as the being, free will, freedom, self-cognizance, change, isolation, despair, solitude, responsibility, and alienation, all of which signal existential themes while Krissandi *et al.* (2024) pay attention to teaching texts to children as a means of learning. Kabdolov (1996) points out that while the descriptions of nature are fictive entities, as Abdullina (2013) argues, historical conditions shape authors' self-determination, a significant focus of literary studies mainly because a literary work aims

at establishing a dialogue with the reader, resulting in presenting a “double code” of the literary text. The idea will be reflected in the peculiarities of the writer’s delivery of a particular idea, his outlook on life, and the principles of summarizing and describing what he saw and learned in his mind according to the vision of social analysis. This includes the authors’ individual style, plot structure, character selection, and word choice that make up the text. However, the desire of each author to create novelty is always related to the historical and cultural framework surrounding the text. The December strike was one of the topics banned before Kazakhstan’s independence (Tolen *et al.*, 2023). Altay, Baygutovich, Tumenbay and Korgasbek wrote about this topic in their stories.

Abenova *et al.* (2019) argue that characters grow from the most minor details of the surrounding life as authors are an integral part of the Earth. According to Ismakova *et al.* (2019), the ideas and trends in modern cultural development and their distinctive features are multifaceted, multilingual, and contradictory, which can be caused by a change in literary works of modern writers updating their stylistic and semantic content. Modern literature in Kazakhstan is characterized by intensification at the level of content and form. There are radical changes in the genre of thinking formed by modern trends and changes (Yussupova *et al.*, 2023).

Innovative ideas were a new stage of spiritual awakening and brought new principles of literary thinking to Kazakh literature, which began in the so-called “Years of Independence”. It is natural for our writers to use psychological, imaginative or social symbolism in their works. For example, Magauin’s works “The Ant Massacre”, “Communist Realism”, “Wolf - Wolf”, and “Curved Tree” analyze one of the most pressing issues of social life and critical philosophy. Magauin (2013) noted, “Illustration, gestures, greed for words, avoidance of judgment, avoidance of encounters with the ultimate truth - one of the main features of modern Kazakh prose in the postmodern spirit”.

Thus, the genre of modern Kazakh literature, including the story, has taken on new forms, both stylistically and thematically. It is obvious that young writers who have just entered the literature are trying to break away from the pattern of Soviet realism and create a new Kazakh literature. This trend was evident in the works of the Golden Bridges of the sixties and the late twentieth century. However, the first of these two groups did not pay much attention to stylistic differences. They touched on new topics in their old writing.

Furthermore, the Golden Bridges conveyed the new themes of the previous generation in a different style of writing. The younger generation is trying to absorb the previous two waves that have just entered the literature. The country’s independence has opened the way for the renewal and expansion of our national literature’s ideological and thematic level. In addition, due to the free inspiration of Kazakh writers, the blank pages of the history of Kazakh literature played a crucial role in the social and political life of the country. They are connected with historical facts like: “December 16” in 1986, “Semipalatinsk test site” in 1989, and “Afghanistan.” Hence, this study discusses the themes and topics found in post-independence Kazakh short fiction to shed light on how these texts can be used pedagogically.

### 3. Methods

The research methods are a diachronic approach and historical analysis of modern topics and ideological concepts applied to describe modern stories’ thematic groups. The stylistic analysis and cognitive approach of the modern stories content have been used in the

research. The content and ideas of stories are analyzed to depict the ideological, social, and thematic features of modern stories written by well-known authors in the years of independence.

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

The first topic of modern stories was the gaining independence on December 16, 1986, when young students and people went on strike against Soviet aggressors. The victims of December 16 were and have been a major topic for discussion among writers. They did not become victims of the politics of that time but became a mirror of life to save their motherland, native language, and religion. This topic was developed by the writers of the Years of Independence. It was not allowed to be written by fellow writers of that period, although they did not reach their peak.

For example, the story of “Zhogalgan Zhurnak (Lost Zhurnak)” by Baigut is about the fate of a young guy who was a victim of the Zheltoksan (December) strike, imprisoned in 1986. Through this character, the writer described the tragedy of the lost generation, which suffered from the tragedy of denationalization and globalization: “Ol Ayqumirsqadan koshpey qalğan jeti-segiz uyyden sal bilayiraqtagı Taqiyatobening tepsenginde, ozi twgan uyyding ornında shapanining eteginen tas togıp otırgan kuyyinde qatıp qaptı. Jurnağ qatıp qalğan tuını Qambar ata kesenesi tuybindegi ainalasına aq sawle shashatın aqshiltim tas tuyptuygel qarayıp ketipti desedi.” (He froze on the steps of Taqiyatobe, a short distance from the seven or eight houses that had been left of Ayqumirska, in the place where he had poured stones from the hem of his shapan instead of the house where he was born. The night when the magazine froze, Qambar Ata said that he looked at the mirror at the bottom of the mausoleum with a white saw.) (Baigut, 2009, p. 157).

If we understand life itself is a struggle, the issue of conflict in the work of art will always be an inexhaustible treasure. Smagulova (2006) states that controversy has its place in the science of literary criticism as an aesthetic category. This is because the problem of literary conflict is wide-ranging. It is an aspect of the writer’s style of individuality and literary recognition of the realities of life, and it also includes ideological and philosophical objectives. The theme of Askar Altaı’s story “Propiska” is also December 16. The story begins with a young man named Arkat returning to his native village seven years later. The purpose was to register his passport and avoid persecution concerning the December events. However, the bus overturned due to snow and blizzard. The bus started again but could not cross the Yrtysh River, so it returned. Urbanization is a disgrace to the Kazakh nation, driven to the city. However, this is not a personal tragedy but a sign of the burden on Kazakh society. It is a bitter truth in Kazakh society.

During the years of independence, Sherhhan Murtaza also wrote a list of stories which revealed social aspects of people’s lives. They are classical stories such as: “Risk Wedding”, “Alapar and Dingo”, “Poem of Shirshan”, “Yellow Goose – Feniks”, “Burshaq”, “Jaramazan”, “Tuz kesel”, “Returning of Fathers”, “Teke burqaq”, “Mingbulaq” and some others. Almost all of the characters in these texts are symbolic actions of people and domestic animals, birds, and wild animals. His stories are also captivating with their delightful collections of literary work. The author’s stories focus on the philosophical representation of social life and regulate the integrity of nature. They are impressive and exciting. The years of independence are also characterized by some wasting vain fortune to organize weddings and parties. People waste money and get loans to show their wealth, while others try to behave as rich. In the story “Tauekel Toi (Risk Wedding)”, the writer criticizes Kerimkul as

a composite character of the modern competitive Kazakh wedding. Our ancestors were very hospitable in the past, but they did not allow arrogance, competition, waste, and pride. The story's character was in debt and very extravagant to organize a Kazakh wedding for his son.

"Alapar and Dingo" is titled by two dog names. One is an Australian dog, and Alapar is a tiny dog. In this story, Sherkhan Muraza reveals two opposite characters: kindness and cruelty, strength and weakness among people. He tries to depict kindness and sympathy through the characteristics of dogs that are not found in people. The story's main idea is to reveal moral values by describing the disappearing dogs among people. Dogs have become more loyal friends of humankind than people to each other. He wanted to convey that today, the world has become polluted again, giants like lions have disappeared, elephants have become smaller, and humans and animals do not behave as they used to. The primary logical value of the story genre during the years of independence is closely connected with the nature of this conflict. The issue of literary conflict is often considered in connection with many plots and characters. The conflict is the soul of the plot, its driving force. The story's decision and the character's fate are directly related to this conflict and its nature. The issue of literary conflict in the genre of storytelling during the years of independence has become more complicated and individualized than in previous periods.

Kabdeskh Zhumadilov's stories that were written during the years of independence are "The Bridegroom", "The Pheasants", "Only Life", "House of God", "Bukharbay's Bull", "Meat Market", "Rounded World-Moon", "Beggar", and "The Last Days of the Poet". "Only Life" begins with a description of the actions of the writer Adil Tazabekov, who came to a sanatorium, tired of the crowded life of the city. The protagonist gets acquainted with the life of the sanatorium and has witnessed various events in society. In addition to these stories, Kuandyk's stories "Angel", "Kobyz's Grief", "Angel," "Kobyz's Grief," "News in the Japanese Village," "Billiards," "Bus to the Flea Market" and "Eye" are about national goals and spiritual values in the new society. The writer could describe pertinent issues related to social life and cultural traditions.

Rakhymzhanov, Mubarak, Mukhanova, T. Akhmetzhan, Oraz, Salykbay, Altay, Ramadan, Kemelbaeva, Korgasbek, and Mukash, the young writers of the independence, raised the literary level of Kazakh literature with their original contributions. The main theme of Koishibai Mubarak's story "Apartment" is the social situation of modern Kazakh youth. The story is interesting to read as it captivates the reader because it narrates the story of a Kazakh boy who came from the steppes to the city. In need of housing, the story makes readers feel the difficulties associated with modern-day city life. Similarly, Askar Altai's stories "Abortion", "Glass", and "Casino" are intended to convey the truth to the reader in a way to warn them against the unfortunate actions of the bitter society. As exemplified in "Casino," these writers exemplified a society in which faith plays an essential part in making it livable: "In a society without God, without faith, everything is allowed ... nothing is alien. Moreover, such monsters in the world will not allow a burning heart, a sick mind to entertain the mind, but only a feeling of resentment." (Qudaysiz qogamga, imansiz adamga bari ruqsat... eshtenge jat emes eken. Al munday mundar duiniede ortti juyrek, dertti sana aqilga qonaq bermey, asaw sezimge gana boy aldirmaq.)

In the 21st century, another group of young people joined the story genre. From a thematic point of view, today's young Kazakh writers are focused on social issues. Among them, today's issues of divorce, housing, unemployment and freedom are predominant in today's literature. However, Kazakh writers of the twentieth century had a government to blame.

The government will step in if you live without an apartment and in poor conditions. There are a few other answers. The young writer Yerbolat Abikenovich's story "We Were Looking for an Apartment" describes the situation of a young couple who could not find a suitable apartment when they went around Almaty and the orphanage seven times. Moreover, the issue of divorce in this story because of a hard life is becoming very problematic today.

The social satire in Abulkhair's story "Paper City" is obvious. The author describes the housing crisis that has engulfed the Kazakh society. This has become a significant obstacle for young people. Self-doubt and skepticism about the future begin with that. The story is told in the first-person singular. The story describes the damage and suffering to the Kazakh national identity, which is suffering from homelessness. Why is this apartment in the sky? It is not a rhetorical question but a philosophical symbol. This is thematically similar to the story of K. Mubarak "Apartment". They both want a heavenly home, not an earthly home. That is a wealth that cannot be imagined. In other words, the work is based on today's social reality, the critical issue in the fate of the Kazakh families - the issue of housing.

The Kazakhs, who hold the pen that "literature should educate the people," are trying to raise this issue as much as possible. This is especially noticeable in the stories of young writer Kanat Tleukhan. His story "The Returned Bride" has an idea of "there will be no nephew", which has become today's Kazakh 'disease'. In this author's story "Medal", today's society is seen from another angle. Kazakhs' interest in awards and jealousy of being better than each other has always been a growing topic. However, today's independent Kazakhstan has acquired an entirely new character. Zhunussova *et al.* (2023) mentioned the necessity of determining the first foundations of the detective genre in our national literature to prove from what period it originates and why it has not yet been studied. This topic is also critical to study. The policy pursued for many years to overshadow the centuries-old spiritual values of our people has led many people astray. This has become a severe problem, especially in the context of globalization and the rise of religious freedom. In the story "Missing Beauty", Mira Shuinshalieva took this fact from her heroine's heart and addressed today's most pressing issues. Her parents and the whole village had high hopes for the future.

Madina Omarova's collection "Laylat al-Qadr" includes no more than half a page of essays and sketches, stories that are illogical to the theoretical principles of literary criticism. The idea of the author's goal in short texts is solved in two words. The writer's unique style of writing and drawing skills show his unexpected knowledge of the world. The only moments carved from life itself seem to be the decisive moments in the long life of the protagonist. In the story of the boy searching for Asha, the fate of an unnamed brother and sister-in-law, an unknown mother, and an unknown hero is told in the search for only twenty tenge. The fate of the whole dynasty and ordinary mothers and children in today's urban and rural families are discussed. The unadulterated reality of today's life, the real life, fits into these few paragraphs.

The peculiarity of vivid prose in the stories of M. Magauin is the creation of the inner rhythm in the composition. For example: "Kommunizm! Ne ishem, ne kiem demeysing. Jappay tengdik. Bari aqildi. Bari bilimdi. Bari – bir tilde soyleitin bir ulis okili. Kapital alemleri qirap, ashtan olip jatqan kezde jer sharining altidan bir boliginde – Sovet Odaginda osinday peyish ornamaq." (Communism! You don't say drink or wear fashion—universal equality. Everything is smart. Everyone is educated. All are members of the same language. At a time when the capitalist world is collapsing and starving to death, such a paradise will be established in one-sixth of the world - in the Soviet Union.) (Magauin, 2007, p. 41).

This story describes the life of the Kazakh people after the country's independence. That is, we can see the image of Soviet society, which remained unchanged for many years. However, Kazakh society also longs for the illusion of the idea of "Communism".

The reality of today's social life is skillfully presented in B. Kanatbayev's "Old People" story. The author draws attention to the impoverishment of national values as the world changes and generations pass. It is revealed in the following passage: "Tawelsizdik kezengi tirshiligimizding alwan salasindagy janga da jarqin betburystarga, janggyrwlarga bastap otyr. Sondyqtan omir shindygin, omirlik materialdardy avtorlyq koncepciya men otkir problemaldarga sabaqtastyra tangdaw men tolgawding man-mangyzy ayyryqsha." (The period of independence began with new and bright changes and revivals in various spheres of our lives. Therefore, it is important to choose and reflect on the realities of life, the materials of life in connection with the author's concept and acute problems.)" (Kabdolov, 1983, p. 94).

In the prose works of the independence period, literary approaches became more complex, and the system of metaphorical, allegorical, grotesque thinking was developed. The nature of modern prose differs in terms of depicting surprises (anthropological, mystical, virtual) to its readers in accordance with the national concept. Literary styles of expressing a new character through the materialization of abstract concepts, the personification of a man and all his inner and outer nature have been formed in prose. The writer compares the wolf and the people in the following passage: "Oh my God! - said the exhausted hunter, leaning against the chimney. - Let Saul's evil wolf be America's national treasure. Who am I in Kazakhstan then?" (- Allam-aw, - dedi amaly tawsylgan angshy uini tozyp, murjaga suyylene ketip. - Shawil degen jaman shi bori Amerikaning ulttyq baylygy bolsin. Men sonda Qazaqstanning kimimin?) (Rakhimzhanov, 2012: 11).

In the work, the writer hints at the character of a wolf in the character of other nationalities living in the Kazakh land. The theme of the writer's work has a great meaning. The fact that M. Magauin's work "Interethnic Conflict" is a true-to-life story with Kazakh spirit is reflected in the perfection of his literary power. Ignorance of the language, the country, the national spirit, the constant use of the Kazakh space for personal gain, the constant perseverance of the Kazakhs, the emergence of other lice in the child - all are revealed through the satirical language: "Well, Kazakh ... You have gained independence, do you need your grandfather's head now? When will you realize that you are the owner of the country?" (Al, qazaq... Tawelsizdik alding, endi atangning basy kerek pe? El iesi ekeningdi qashan ugasing?) (Eleukenov, 2012, p. 24). The question, inspires the national spirit of the reader, as the story concludes "The national idea comes from our common destiny. Whether bitter or sweet, it is our only condition to live today and tomorrow." (Ulttyq ideya bizding orta tagdyrymyzdan twindaydy. Ol ashqy bolsin, tatti bolsin-bizding buygin de, erteng de omir suyrwimizding birden-bir sharty.) In general, the field of prose, including the genre of short stories, deepened thematically and ideologically, and new literary images were observed in the literature. This is because of the discovery of the relationship between man and society, man and nature, as well as concepts such as thoughts and feelings, conscience and shame, dreams and goals, actions and attitudes, to express their views on each of them, to find new ways of writing. They are encouraged to find new approaches to writing styles. Therefore, the Kazakh stories born during the years of independence resulted from a new search.

Kazakhstan's becoming an independent country is essential in strengthening the deep-rooted Kazakh people, the sovereignty that the ancestors longed for. Thanks to independence, new

pages of the original history have been opened. The goal is to study the past and present of Kazakh history. The history of our literature needs to be reconsidered with the same taste. Innovative research began in the so-called “Years of Independence” and was a new stage of spiritual renewal and brought new principles of literary thinking to Kazakh literature (Nazarbayev, 1996, p. 36).

The extinction of the people’s national spirit does not lead to good. We can say that only literature can revive the extinct spirit. D. Ashimkhanuly commented: “When the Indian people, who had been under British rule for many years, gained independence, Jawahar Nehru said “Barin qalpina keltiremiz. Kedeysilikten qutylamyz, baylyqqa da jetemiz, qiragan muylikmuykamalding da orny tolady. Eng jamany otarlyq ezgining aserinen xalqymyz rxwın jogaltyp aldy. Orny tolmas okinishimiz de osy” (We will restore everything. We will get out of poverty and rich, and the destroyed property will be replaced. Worst of all, our people lost their spirit due to colonial oppression. This is our irreplaceable regret).

In the same way, many years of colonialism and nomadism have broken the spirit of the Kazakh people. And now, who will lift the spirits of our people? We consider that only literature can bear it. Therefore, the current task of our literature should be to raise the spirits of our people (Kazakh Literature, 2001).

Magauin’s (2002) “Ant Massacre”, “Communist Realism”, “Wolf, Wolf”, “Curved Tree”, “Double Tree”, T. Nurmagambetov’s “Tick”, etc. analyze one of the most pressing issues of social life, namely, critical philosophy. It is natural for writers of the era to use psychological, imaginative or social symbolism in their works as “Illustration, gestures, greed for words, judgment, avoidance of encounters with the ultimate truth - one of the main features of modern Kazakh literature in the postmodernist spirit” (Eleukenov, 2012, p. 24).

Another popular topic is love. Love is an eternal theme, but every writer comes to this topic in his style. One sees it as an ideal, and the other proves it with real-life examples. Love preserves its essence in any situation. Toksambayeva (2007) notes that notions of honor and honesty may diminish when individuals experience love. This topic has been widely and comprehensively written during the years of independence. Having analyzed modern stories written and published in the last years of independence, we distinguished the main thematic groups and ideological aspects. They are connected with changes in policy, economic and social aspects. The main thematic groups connected with situations that happened in the country are political changes, mostly related to repressions that happened because of the strike on December 16, depiction of human characteristics with mystical, virtual, mythological objects, animals, etc., social norms, family relations, love, and traditions, religion and perception of the world, and human values such as hypocrisy, injustice, and unfaithfulness. Modern stories of the independence period are renewed in terms of themes and images, literary features, and poetic style. The individual signature of the writers is also determined by the language differences (ornamental) in the depiction of new themes and life phenomena. The description of the relationship between man and the material world was a discontinuous trend in fiction.

## 5. Conclusion

The last 30 years of independence, a historical turning point in Kazakh society, is marked by the complexity of the nature of literary works born during the last years. The modern reader needs to re-describe well-known situations in a new way by using unprecedented literary styles. This study has shown that the genre of Kazakh storytelling has developed significantly



during the years of independence. Themes formed in the previous period developed on their own, the country's independence brought new and modern directions by the writers, and the range of topics written during this period expanded. This aligns with what Zorba and Arikan (2023) underline: encouraging students to read literary texts, research and discuss what they read and then produce materials (spoken or written) on top of what they have done throughout the process helps teachers create an active learning environment. Hence, classroom teaching focusing on Kazakh literature should systematically be based on research showing the themes and issues available in national literature.

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