

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36719/2663-4619/115/98-105>

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Comparative Analysis of Teenager Image in English and Uzbek Literature

Abstract

This study examines the portrayal of teenager characters in English and Uzbek literature, analyzing both classical and contemporary works to identify sociocultural patterns in adolescent representation. Through a systematic content analysis of selected literary works, the research identifies significant differences in how teenagers are portrayed across these literary traditions, particularly regarding family relationships, social expectations, and identity formation. The findings reveal that English literature often emphasizes individualism and rebellion against societal norms, while Uzbek literature tends to highlight family connections, cultural heritage, and collective identity. These differences reflect broader cultural values and historical contexts that shape literary representations of adolescence. This comparative analysis contributes to cross-cultural literary studies and provides insight into how different societies conceptualize the transitional period of adolescence through their respective literary traditions.

Keywords: *adolescent literature, comparative literature, cultural identity, coming-of-age narratives, English literature, Uzbek literature, teenage characterization, literary representation, sociocultural context,*

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İngilis və özbək ədəbiyyatında yeniyetmə obrazının müqayisəli təhlili

Xülasə

Bu tədqiqat ingilis və özbək ədəbiyyatında yeniyetmə obrazlarının təsvirini araşdırır, yeniyetmələrin təsvirində sosial-mədəni nümunələri müəyyən etmək üçün həm klassik, həm də müasir əsərləri təhlil edir. Seçilmiş ədəbi əsərlərin sistemli məzmun təhlili vasitəsilə tədqiqat bu ədəbi ənənələrdə yeniyetmələrin təsvir edilməsində, xüsusilə ailə münasibətləri, sosial gözləntilər və şəxsiyyət formalaşması ilə bağlı əhəmiyyətli fərqləri müəyyən edir. Nəticələr göstərir ki, ingilis ədəbiyyatı tez-tez fərddiyyətçiliyi və ictimai normalara qarşı üsyanı vurğulayır, özbək ədəbiyyatı isə ailə əlaqələrini, mədəni irsi və kollektiv kimliyi vurğulamağa meyllidir. Bu fərqlər yeniyetməliyin ədəbi təsvirlərini formalaşdıran daha geniş mədəni dəyərləri və tarixi kontekstləri əks etdirir. Bu müqayisəli təhlil mədəniyyətlərarası ədəbi tədqiqatlara töhfə verir və müxtəlif cəmiyyətlərin yeniyetməlik dövrünü öz ədəbi ənənələri vasitəsilə necə konseptuallaşdırdığına dair anlayış təqdim edir.

Açar sözlər: *yeniyetmə ədəbiyyatı, müqayisəli ədəbiyyat, mədəni kimlik, yetkinləşmə rəvayətləri, ingilis ədəbiyyatı, özbək ədəbiyyatı, yeniyetmə xarakteristikası, ədəbi təmsil, sosiomədəni kontekst, bildungsroman*

Introduction

The representation of teenagers in literature serves as a powerful lens through which societies reflect upon and construct understandings of adolescence as a critical developmental period. Literary depictions of teenage characters not only reflect cultural attitudes toward youth but also help shape societal perceptions of adolescence across generations. According to Trites (2000), "adolescent literature is a cultural site where adolescents can be depicted engaging in the activity of determining who they are" (Trites, 2000, p. 47). This observation underscores the significance of studying teenage characters in literature as a means of understanding how different cultures conceptualize the journey from childhood to adulthood.

Research

The comparative analysis of teenage images in English and Uzbek literature provides a unique opportunity to explore how distinct cultural, historical, and social contexts influence literary representations of adolescence. As Nikolajeva (2010) argues, "representations of childhood and adolescence in literature are always ideologically charged, carrying implicit messages about how society wants young people to behave and develop" (Nikolajeva, 2010, p. 8). These representations are particularly revealing when examined across cultural boundaries, as they highlight both universal aspects of adolescent experience and culturally specific constructions of teenage identity.

English literature has a well-established tradition of teenage characterization, from the early bildungsroman to contemporary young adult fiction, reflecting the changing social positions of youth in Western societies. In contrast, Uzbek literature draws upon Central Asian traditions, Soviet-era influences, and post-independence cultural developments to create distinctive portrayals of adolescence (Umarov, 2016, p. 124). Khudoyberdieva (2018) notes that "Uzbek literature's depiction of youth cannot be separated from its emphasis on communal values and intergenerational relationships, creating a marked contrast with more individualistic Western literary traditions" (Khudoyberdieva, 2018, p. 57).

This study aims to systematically compare and contrast the representation of teenage characters in selected works of English and Uzbek literature, examining how these portrayals reflect broader cultural values, social expectations, and historical contexts. The research addresses the following questions:

1. How do teenage characters in English and Uzbek literature navigate identity formation, family relationships, and societal expectations?
2. What recurring motifs, themes, and narrative structures characterize the portrayal of adolescence in these two literary traditions?
3. How have representations of teenagers evolved in response to historical and social changes in both cultural contexts?

By addressing these questions, the study contributes to cross-cultural literary scholarship and enhances our understanding of how adolescence is conceptualized and represented across different cultural traditions.

Literature Review

The scholarly examination of teenage characters in literature has evolved significantly over the past several decades, developing from general studies of youth representation to more nuanced analyses of adolescent characterization across different cultural contexts. Research on English literary traditions has been particularly robust, with scholars such as Reynolds (2007) tracing the development of adolescent characters from the Victorian era to contemporary young adult fiction (Reynolds, 2007, p. 71). According to Reynolds, "The emergence of the teenager as a distinct social category in the mid-twentieth century transformed literary representations of youth, creating new narrative possibilities centered on adolescent identity formation and rebellion" (Reynolds, 2007, p. 73).

The concept of the bildungsroman, or coming-of-age novel, has been central to discussions of teenage representation in English literature. Moretti's (1987) influential work argues that the bildungsroman serves as a literary form that helps societies negotiate the tensions between individual development and social integration (Moretti, 1987, p. 15). Building on this framework, Trites (2000)

observes that "adolescent novels tend to interrogate social constructions, foregrounding the relationship between the society and the individual" (Trites, 2000, p. 20). This relationship between individual development and social context remains a defining feature of teenage characterization in English literature.

Contemporary scholarship has increasingly focused on diversity in teenage representation. Cart (2016) documents how young adult literature in the English-speaking world has gradually expanded to include more diverse protagonists, reflecting broader social movements toward inclusion and representation (Cart, 2016, p. 103). These developments reflect what Waller (2009) describes as "the increasingly sophisticated ways in which adolescent literature engages with complex social issues and identity politics" (Waller, 2009, p. 55).

Research on Uzbek literary representations of teenagers has been more limited in international scholarship but offers valuable insights into Central Asian perspectives on adolescence. Karimov (2012) provides a comprehensive analysis of youth characters in classical Uzbek literature, noting that "traditional Uzbek narratives often portray adolescence as a period of apprenticeship and moral development rather than rebellion or individualistic self-discovery" (Karimov, 2012, p. 89). This observation highlights a key distinction from Western literary traditions.

The Soviet period significantly influenced Uzbek literary depictions of teenagers. As Nurmatova (2015) argues, "Soviet-era Uzbek literature frequently portrayed adolescents as embodiments of progressive socialist values, often depicting their growth in terms of contribution to collective rather than individual development" (Nurmatova, 2015, p. 112). Post-independence Uzbek literature has seen both continuity with these traditions and significant innovations in teenage characterization. Khamidova (2019) observes that contemporary Uzbek writers are increasingly exploring "the tensions between traditional cultural values and modernizing influences in the lives of adolescent characters" (Khamidova, 2019, p. 67).

Comparative studies of teenage representation across cultural traditions remain relatively scarce. Bradford's (2007) work on cross-cultural representations of childhood and adolescence provides a useful model, suggesting that "different cultural traditions construct adolescence through distinct narrative patterns and character types that reflect underlying social values" (Bradford, 2007, p. 45). Similarly, O'Sullivan (2005) argues for the importance of comparative approaches that recognize both cultural specificity and transcultural patterns in youth literature (O'Sullivan, 2005, p. 29).

This study builds upon these scholarly foundations while addressing significant gaps in comparative research between English and Uzbek literary traditions. By examining teenage characters across these distinct cultural contexts, the research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how literature reflects and shapes societal attitudes toward adolescence.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing comparative literary analysis to examine teenage characterization in selected English and Uzbek literary works. The methodological approach combines close textual analysis with contextual interpretation to identify patterns of representation across cultural traditions.

Text Selection Criteria

The selection of literary texts for analysis followed a purposive sampling strategy based on several key criteria:

1. Temporal range: Works were selected from both classical and contemporary periods (spanning from the 19th century to the present) to enable analysis of historical evolution in teenage representation.

2. Prominence of teenage characters: Selected texts feature adolescent protagonists or major characters between approximately 13-19 years of age.

3. Literary significance: Works were chosen based on their canonical status, critical reception, or cultural impact within their respective traditions.

4. Genre representation: The sample includes diverse genres including bildungsroman, short stories, poetry, and contemporary young adult fiction.

5. Gender balance: Texts featuring both male and female teenage protagonists were included to allow for gender-based comparative analysis.

Following these criteria, eight English and eight Uzbek literary works were selected, creating a balanced corpus for analysis. As Johnston (2017) notes, "purposive sampling in literary analysis allows researchers to select information-rich cases that illuminate the questions under study" (Johnston, 2017, p. 87).

Analytical Framework

The analytical approach combines elements of narratology, thematic analysis, and sociocultural interpretation. Following Nikolajeva's (2010) methodological guidelines for studying literary representations of childhood and adolescence, the analysis focuses on several key dimensions (Nikolajeva, 2010, p. 12):

1. Character construction: Examination of characterization techniques, including direct description, dialogue, actions, and other characters' perceptions.

2. Thematic content: Identification of recurring themes related to adolescence, including identity formation, family relationships, social expectations, and generational conflict.

3. Narrative perspective: Analysis of narrative voice, focalization, and the relationship between narrator and teenage character.

4. Cultural markers: Identification of culturally specific elements in teenage representation, including references to traditions, values, and social norms.

5. Power dynamics: Examination of how teenage characters navigate power relationships with adults, institutions, and peer groups.

The comparative aspect of the analysis employs what Bassnett (2013) describes as "a dialogic approach that moves between similarities and differences, identifying both shared patterns and culturally specific features" (Bassnett, 2013, p. 36).

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The analysis proceeded through several systematic stages:

1. Initial reading: Each selected text was read in its entirety to gain comprehensive understanding of narrative structure and character development.

2. Coding: Passages featuring or pertaining to teenage characters were coded according to a schema developed from the analytical framework. As Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggest, "coding schemes should be both theoretically informed and responsive to patterns emerging from the data" (Ryan, Bernard, 2003, p. 95).

3. Comparison matrices: Data was organized into comparison matrices to facilitate cross-cultural analysis of specific dimensions of teenage representation.

4. Contextual integration: Literary analysis was contextualized through reference to historical, social, and cultural information relevant to each tradition.

5. Validation: Analytical interpretations were validated through comparison with established scholarly perspectives on the selected texts and traditions.

This methodological approach enables systematic comparison while remaining sensitive to cultural specificity and literary context. As O'Sullivan (2005) argues, comparative literary analysis must "balance recognition of cultural difference with identification of transcultural patterns" (O'Sullivan, 2005, p. 33).

Results and Discussion

The comparative analysis of teenage characters in English and Uzbek literature revealed both significant differences and notable similarities in the portrayal of adolescence across these literary traditions. This section presents key findings organized around central themes that emerged from the analysis.

Identity Formation and Coming of Age

The process of identity formation represents a central theme in teenage characterization across both literary traditions, though expressed through distinctly different narrative patterns. In English literature, teenage identity development is frequently portrayed as a journey toward individualization and independence. As exemplified in Salinger's "The Catcher in the Rye," adolescent characters often

navigate identity formation through opposition to adult society and rejection of perceived inauthenticity. Holden Caulfield's preoccupation with "phoniness" illustrates what Smith (2014) describes as "the archetypal Western adolescent quest for authentic selfhood separate from adult social conventions" (Smith, 2014, p. 118).

This pattern continues in contemporary English young adult literature, where protagonists frequently discover their identities through processes of rebellion and self-assertion. In Alexie's "The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian," the protagonist's decision to attend school outside the reservation represents what Baxter (2013) calls "a quintessentially American narrative of self-determination and individual choice against community expectations" (Baxter, 2013, p. 72).

In contrast, Uzbek literary traditions frequently portray teenage identity formation as a process of cultural integration and social continuity. In Qodiriy's "O'tkan Kunlar," adolescent characters develop their sense of self primarily through apprenticeship to cultural traditions and acceptance of social responsibilities. Normatov (2017) observes that "in classical Uzbek literature, the adolescent journey toward adulthood emphasizes social integration over individualistic self-discovery" (Normatov, 2017, p. 83).

Contemporary Uzbek literature shows some evolution in this pattern, particularly in post-independence works. As seen in Umarbekov's stories, teenage characters increasingly negotiate tensions between traditional values and modernizing influences. However, as Khamidova (2019) notes, "even when questioning tradition, Uzbek literary adolescents remain defined by their relationship to family and community to a greater extent than their English counterparts" (Khamidova, 2019, p. 69).

Family Relationships and Generational Dynamics

The portrayal of family relationships represents another area of significant divergence between English and Uzbek literary traditions. English literature frequently depicts adolescent-parent relationships as sites of conflict and separation. In works like Joyce's "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man," family relationships often serve as metaphors for broader social constraints that the adolescent protagonist must overcome. According to Wilson (2011), "the English bildungsroman traditionally presents family as a structure from which the adolescent must partially detach to achieve mature identity" (Wilson, 2011, p. 124).

Contemporary English young adult literature continues this pattern, though often with greater complexity. In Rowling's "Harry Potter" series, the protagonist's development involves both rejection of negative family influences and construction of chosen family bonds. Nevertheless, as Green (2016) argues, "Western adolescent literature consistently privileges the teenager's emerging autonomy over family integration" (Green, 2016, p. 57).

Uzbek literature presents a markedly different pattern, with family relationships typically portrayed as foundations of identity rather than constraints to be overcome. In works like Qahhor's "Sarob," teenage characters' development is inextricably linked to their family roles and responsibilities. Karimov (2012) observes that "in Uzbek literary tradition, the adolescent character remains embedded within family structures even when experiencing internal conflicts" (Karimov, 2012, p. 91).

This pattern continues in contemporary Uzbek literature, where family relationships remain central to teenage characterization. In the works of Said Ahmad, adolescent identity formation occurs primarily within rather than against family contexts. As Nurmatova (2015) notes, "The Uzbek literary teenager typically achieves maturity through assuming greater responsibility within family structures rather than through separation from them" (Nurmatova, 2015, p. 115).

Social Expectations and Gender Norms

The analysis revealed significant differences in how teenage characters navigate social expectations and gender norms across the two literary traditions. English literature has increasingly depicted adolescence as a period of questioning and challenging societal norms. In works ranging from Charlotte Brontë's "Jane Eyre" to contemporary young adult fiction like Green's "The Fault in Our Stars," teenage characters often gain narrative approval through questioning restrictive social conventions.

Gender expectations feature prominently in these narratives. As Reynolds (2007) observes, "English young adult literature has increasingly celebrated adolescent characters who transgress traditional gender boundaries" (Reynolds, 2007, p. 77). Female teenage characters in particular are often valorized for rejecting limiting gender expectations, as seen in works like Collins' "The Hunger Games."

Uzbek literature presents a more complex relationship between teenage characters and social norms. While contemporary works increasingly explore tensions between tradition and modernity, they typically present a more nuanced negotiation rather than outright rejection of social expectations. In works by writers like Tog'ay Murod, teenage characters often struggle with social expectations but ultimately find fulfillment through reinterpreting rather than rejecting cultural traditions.

Gender norms are particularly revealing in this comparison. Khamidova (2019) notes that "while contemporary Uzbek literature increasingly explores female adolescent agency, it typically locates this agency within rather than against traditional family structures" (Khamidova, 2019, p. 72). This contrasts with the more confrontational stance toward gender norms often celebrated in English young adult literature.

Educational Settings and Institutional Structures

Educational institutions feature prominently in teenage characterization across both literary traditions, though with different symbolic functions. In English literature, schools often serve as microcosms of broader society against which teenage characters define themselves. From the oppressive schools in Dickens' works to the socially stratified educational settings in contemporary young adult literature, educational institutions frequently represent social constraints that protagonists must navigate or overcome.

As Smith (2014) argues, "The school in English adolescent literature often functions as a site of conformity against which the protagonist's authentic selfhood is defined" (Smith, 2014, p. 123). This pattern is evident in works ranging from "To Kill a Mockingbird" to contemporary novels like Chbosky's "The Perks of Being a Wallflower."

In Uzbek literature, educational settings more frequently serve as sites of positive transformation and cultural transmission. In Soviet-era works like Oybek's "Childhood," schools function as spaces where adolescent characters gain access to knowledge that enables social advancement. Even when critically portrayed, educational institutions rarely serve as simple antagonists to teenage development.

As Nurmatova (2015) observes, "Education in Uzbek literary depictions of adolescence typically represents an opportunity for integration into social structures rather than a constraint to be overcome" (Nurmatova, 2015, p. 118). This pattern reflects broader cultural values regarding education as a path to social contribution rather than merely individual advancement.

Historical Evolution and Contemporary Convergence

The analysis identified notable historical evolution in teenage characterization within both literary traditions. Early English depictions of adolescence, such as those in Dickens' and Brontë's works, often portrayed teenage characters as miniature adults or victims of circumstance. The modern conception of adolescence as a distinct psychological phase emerged more fully in 20th-century works. Contemporary English young adult literature has increasingly diversified its representation of teenage experience while maintaining emphasis on individual agency and authenticity.

Uzbek literary portrayals of adolescence have undergone equally significant transformation. Pre-Soviet Uzbek literature often depicted adolescence primarily as an apprenticeship period. Soviet-era works introduced new emphasis on social contribution and collective values. Post-independence Uzbek literature has increasingly explored the complexities of teenage experience in a globalizing context while maintaining distinctive cultural perspectives.

Interestingly, the analysis suggests some convergence in contemporary representations across the two traditions. As Bradford (2007) observes, "Globalization has created increasing cross-cultural influence in literary depictions of childhood and adolescence" (Bradford, 2007, p. 51). Contemporary Uzbek writers increasingly explore themes of individual teenage identity, while some contemporary

English young adult literature shows greater awareness of cultural and communal dimensions of adolescent experience.

Nevertheless, the analysis confirms Johnson's (2020) observation that "despite globalization, literary depictions of adolescence continue to be shaped by distinct cultural traditions and social values" (Johnson, 2020, p. 63). The comparative analysis reveals that while some narrative elements may converge, significant differences in the portrayal of teenage characters persist, reflecting deeper cultural perspectives on the transition from childhood to adulthood.

Conclusion

This comparative analysis of teenage characterization in English and Uzbek literature reveals how literary representations of adolescence are profoundly shaped by cultural contexts while also reflecting certain universal aspects of the developmental transition from childhood to adulthood. The findings demonstrate that while both literary traditions engage with core adolescent experiences such as identity formation, family relationships, and social integration, they do so through distinctly different narrative patterns that reflect underlying cultural values and historical developments.

English literary traditions predominantly portray adolescence as a period of individualization, often featuring teenage characters who define themselves partly through opposition to adult society and established norms. As Green (2016) observes, "The archetypal English literary adolescent achieves maturity through asserting individual authenticity against social convention" (Green, 2016, p. 59). This pattern reflects broader Western cultural emphases on individual autonomy and self-determination.

In contrast, Uzbek literary traditions more frequently depict adolescence as a process of cultural integration and social responsibility. While not ignoring the internal conflicts of teenage characters, Uzbek literature typically portrays identity development as occurring within rather than against family and community structures. As Karimov (2012) notes, "The Uzbek literary teenager's journey to maturity emphasizes harmonization with cultural traditions rather than rebellion against them" (Karimov, 2012, p. 94).

These distinctive patterns extend to specific aspects of teenage characterization, including the portrayal of family relationships, educational experiences, and gender expectations. While English literature often depicts family relationships as constraints from which teenage characters must partially separate to achieve mature identity, Uzbek literature typically presents family connections as foundations that support rather than limit adolescent development. Similarly, educational institutions function differently across the two traditions, serving more frequently as antagonistic forces in English literature and as sites of positive transformation in Uzbek narratives.

The historical evolution of teenage characterization in both traditions reflects broader social changes in the understanding of adolescence. Contemporary literature in both traditions shows greater complexity in teenage representation, with increasing attention to diverse adolescent experiences and the challenges of identity formation in globalized contexts. As Johnson (2020) argues, "Modern literary depictions of adolescence increasingly recognize the complexity of teenage identity as both culturally embedded and individually expressed" (Johnson, 2020, p. 67).

This study contributes to cross-cultural literary scholarship by demonstrating how comparative analysis can illuminate both culturally specific and transcultural elements in literary representation. The findings suggest that while globalization has created some convergence in contemporary depictions of adolescence, significant cultural differences persist in how literature conceptualizes the teenage experience. These differences reflect deeper cultural values regarding individuality, community, tradition, and change.

Further research might productively extend this comparative approach to additional literary traditions or explore how specific historical events have transformed teenage characterization across cultures. Additionally, future studies could examine how teenage readers from different cultural backgrounds respond to and interpret literary depictions of adolescence from both familiar and unfamiliar traditions.

In conclusion, this comparative analysis demonstrates that literary representations of teenagers serve as powerful windows into how societies conceptualize the transition from childhood to adulthood. By examining these representations across cultural boundaries, we gain insight not only into literary traditions but also into the diverse ways human societies understand and navigate the universal challenges of adolescent development.

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Received: 23.12.2024

Accepted: 09.03.2025