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**THE FORMATIVE VALUE OF LITERARY TEXTS TO STUDENTS
WITH MENTAL DISABILITIES**

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Abstract

The formation of mental disabilities students' communication competence by means of literary texts constitutes an important stage in the becoming of human being as receptor of literary works and phenomena. The development of student's aesthetic and moral attitude towards classes of Romanian language and literature in general, and especially towards the literary work requires the selection of different technologies and didactic activities.

The main directions that are discussed in the research from communication domain, especially of texts formation/interpretation at students with mental disabilities, are targeting the formation of communicative behaviour through various strategies of educational interaction. This situation generates the research problem that consists in analysing the communication competence at students with mental disabilities by means of literary text more exactly in determining the level of vocabulary development and enrichment, their training into free discussions, but also their written and oral expression during the Romanian language and literature classes.

Among the main objectives of the research, we enumerate: the determination of initial level of students' preparation as starting point for psycho-pedagogical organisation of the experiment; the utilisation of specific didactic strategy in order to form the communication competence by means of literary text at students with mental disabilities; elaboration of curricular demarche of formation of communication competence by means of literary text at students with mental disabilities.

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1. Introduction

The didactic approach of the communication competence by means of literary text can be interpreted in a different manner, according to the studied literary genre, according to the potential of



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every student with mental disability, here being important the vision on text reception by the students readers. For the text unscramble, there must be opted for the choice of methods and procedures appropriated to the students' level, in the same time taking into account also their knowledge, but also to their possibility/capacity of understanding. Students are attracted by permanent study and lecture through the variety of literary texts met in a lecture hall of the learning institution.

Concerning the student with mental deficiency, for teaching the different literary texts it is necessary to ensure the thorough assimilation of basic concept. In this way, according to the *Reading-Writing-Communication curriculum* (approved through the ministry order no. 5235/01.09.2008), the texts reading is made calling upon a model reading, expressive reading, role-playing reading, dramatized reading, selective reading, which allow the practice of individual reading ability. The imagistic vocabulary, sentence integration exercises, didactic game, conversations on images, communication in dialogues „question – answer” are a few exercises of vocabulary training and activation in general and of its utilisation in new situation. The association verbalisation-writing will allow the automation of correct legible aesthetic orthographic writing skills of messages used in communication.

Among the communication difficulties of mentally disabled students, we enumerate: the spoken language is usually difficult or it doesn't exist, word being often used improperly, they more often use gestures than words (or other non-verbal means of communication), there is the tendency to repeat words or phrases (sometimes they can repeat without mistake short words from cartoons that they watched on television), the impossibility to concentrate their attention and to be coherent.

In nowadays education there have been major changes both at national and international level, and the students, not taking into account their psychological and communication particularities, the origin, must be supported and encouraged in their development.

Among the authors with preoccupations for communication and language in the learning process concerning the students with mental disabilities, we mention: Constantin Păunescu (1976, p. 227) – “the knowledge potential is limited both as differentiation power and as extension; what doesn't spontaneously appear at the mental deficient is the possibility of differentiation of stimuli categories”; Doru-Vlad Popovici (2000, pp. 172-173) – “Creating some programmes addressed to the development and therapy of language at mentally deficient people, should take into account both the specificity of language development and the characteristics and indicated frequency of the different existing disorders, which perturbs, significantly, the communication activity”.

In the pedagogical publishing, the people who came with contribution in order to clarify the notion of communication are: Ursula Schiopu (1992); Ilie Stănică (1993).

There was very little written about the formative value of literary texts at students with mental disabilities in the specialty literature.

The reason of choosing this topic “The formative value of literary texts at students with mental disabilities” consists in the fact that, one of the modern education demands is that of forming at our students the capacity of creative thinking, but also to solve individually or by co-working the problems that they confront with.

The purpose of this study is to analyse the communication competence at students with mental disabilities by means of literary text in Romanian language and literature classes.

Based on group work experiences, both with normal education students and with special education students, by exploitation of literary/non-literary text, this study complies with the students' intellectual capacities and contributes at formation of some life skills as:

- Raising the literary sensibility and the pleasure for reading;
- World knowledge and self-knowledge through lecture;
- Discovering the promoted values in literary works they read and their own values;
- Opening to another thing, to the unknown, to unusual part;
- Formation of some positive attitudes which to be applied in a plural society: respect for diversity,

for identity of the skilful ones, and implicitly, the rejection of intolerant and discriminatory attitudes towards these ones.

The research hypothesis: if I use didactic strategies in the instructive-educative process during Romanian language and literature classes at students with mental disabilities by means of literary texts, creating an enjoyable working atmosphere, these can influence school performance and success, more exactly will determine the vocabulary development and enrichment, training in free discussions, but also their written and oral expression.

2. Theoretical Foundation and Related Literature

In the „Psychology of mental deficient people“, Mariana Rosca renders a few aspects related to the language of students with mental disabilities, where it is stated in the same time that: “vocabulary of these children is more limited than that of normal ones, especially concerning the aspect of some notion-words with abstract character. Some words are often misused by children with mental disabilities in a different context than the one they were learnt. In mentally disabled children's vocabulary, the words-notions are poorly represented which designate size, spatial relations, and psychical characteristics. Students with mental deficiencies develop deficiencies and concerning the comprehension capacity aspect and especially to use comparisons, epithets and metaphors, but still they are capable to positively appreciate a text. Together with the activity of students' vocabulary enrichment, teachers from special education should also ensure the elaboration of existent terms, and also the passing over a greater number of words from passive language into the active one. An important problem is that of procedures by which there can be better revealed the significance of the new words, and that is the problem of the way in which this student acquires the words in the context and on the basis of intuitive material” (1967, pp. 116-119).

About the same problem Doru-Vlad Popovici also tells some things, and he states that: “methods which can be used to elucidate the problems related to lexicon, concern the speech therapists, defectologists and educators from the special education system; practically, the language development is realised by means of all education disciplines, in an interdisciplinary vision. During the lectures, the vocabulary can be enriched, by direct contact with literary text. In order to ensure the conscient following of literary texts by students, these ones should understand the meaning of every word, collocations, sentences or phrases. In the case of reading and commenting a text which is full of new terms, their explanation should be made as part of a preparatory discussion in a way that, while model reading, students should be able to understand the text. On the contrary, in the situation when, in the texts there appear only a few new texts, their explanation can be done, either after a model reading by a defectologist

or to resume reading in fragments. In practice, there are used many methods and means to make children understand the meaning of an unknown word or of a known one, of verbal label, which unfolds in stages, from simple to complex” (2000, pp. 170-171).

Concerning the students from special education, Alois Gherguț in „Summaries of special psychopedagogy” (2005, pp. 216-226), analysing the specific particularities of children's learning process with different types of deficiency, he concluded that objectives formulation, instruction content establishment, means of transmission in the class and students' assessment should be done differently.

For the students with mental deficiencies it is recommended the usage of *narration* as didactic method, accompanied by illustrative-suggestive supports or by filmed images; in this way their attention is more easily captured and it is facilitated the students' affective-motivational involvement in the lesson stages. Methods as *explanation* and *description* are more rarely used as freestanding methods, they being more indicated as procedures as part of other methods, whereas these methods solicit a pretty developed vocabulary at students, and for the ones with more accentuated mental deficiencies, this thing is harder to reach. The interrogative methods favours the discovery of the new, rehearsing of physical processes, clarification, synthesizing, knowledge strengthen and systematisation, performances checking and assessment. The practical proved the necessity of a mixture between interrogative and other methods (expositive, demonstrative, active-participative); in this way the monotony is removed, thinking and attention focussing are stimulated, necessary conditions in success at students with special demands.

Mariana Marin sustains in her paper *Teaching reading* (2013, p. 11) that „literature reader's formation through literary text is an important becoming process of the human being in her/his quality as receptor of literary works and phenomena, by the reception activity, understanding both the so-called perception of literary text and the interpretation activities of this one, namely hermeneutics. ”

Ioan Derșidan (1992, pp. 34-35) shows that the text importance and reception theory is emphasized in the great majority of studies that follow Romanian literature teaching and learning in school or simply the books fate; reading is a knowledge event, orienting the students' thinking and sensibility upon the literary work, work recognition, revealing a certain way of taking the world. Bringing students in work knowledge, the teacher goes through this way together with them, the questions and answers, surprises the vision novelty and originality. Literature means knowledge and discovery, and its comprehension and explanation require student's affective and rational participation, clear notions, and clear expression.

As Vistian Goia (2002, pp. 147-148) mentions, the study of literary works or of fragments recommended by curriculums and existent in the alternative textbooks is differently made, depending on the followed objectives and the structure of the respective texts. This study goes through certain stages, through initial reading, until ample interpretation by a few procedures of literary commentary.

The analysis can't be applied to all its complexity, either due to the limited knowledge of learnt literary theory, or to students' incapacity to seize, at their age, states of mind or special artistic particularities. Students meet a various range of texts; they learn to distinguish them, to receive some of them, and, in the same time, to produce texts of different types.

3. Methodology

I achieved an empirical research of qualitative type starting from the topic framing in a theoretical space and reaching the emphasizing of practical activities with the goal of improving and optimizing the didactic process.

The didactic strategies used as part of the research have been selected to answer the main demands of investigation, to determine the vocabulary development and enrichment, training in free discussions, but also mentally disabled students' written and oral expression. Therefore, for the hypothesis confirmation or invalidation we used a methodological system composed from:

- non-experimental data collection methods: systematic observation during the entire experiment, analysis of activity products method, tests;
- powered or intervention methods: the psycho-pedagogical experiment unfolded in three stages (ascertaining stage, formative stage experiment and final assessment stage).

3.1. Research variables:

- independent variable consists in used didactic strategies in order to form and develop the communication competence at students with mental disabilities;
- dependent variable targets the expected modifications concerning students' learning situation improvement at Romanian language and literature, school and behaviour performances.

This topic has been subject to the research during school year 2015-2016.

3.2. Sample of Participants:

In order to follow the objectives and to check the formulated hypothesis I will include in the research: *the experimental sample* formed from 12 students– 6 girls and 6 boys – from 9th A grade and *the control sample* formed still from 12 students, from whom 7 girls and 5 boys from 9th B grade.

3.3. Research Stages:

3.3.1. *In ascertaining stage* I applied the test of initial assessment both at the experimental sample and the control sample, to establish the existent level of students' communication competence development in the initiation moment of psychological experiment. The test included items that targeted: sentences formulation with opposite meanings of some given terms, establishing close meaning for the underlined words in a poem, explanation of meanings of the underlined words from a given text, correct version choice, establishing a correspondent for the given expressions, establishing literary doublet of every regional element, realization of a dialogue on a given topic.

Initial evaluation test

1. Make up sentences with opposite meaning (which differs by a prefix) of the following terms: salty, normal, capable, approve, moral. (1 p)
2. Find similar meaning of the underlined words from the following poem: (1 p)

“The three ships had started...

Will the wind take them to the shore?...

What silent harbours,

Will see them coming driven by longing sad wanderings?..."

(*Romance of the three ships*, Ion Minulescu)

3. Explain the underlined words from the given text: (1 p)

"At night we dream the school: a big, big and beautiful palace, with iron gates, with small windows, with bright doors, with walls painted like some icons, and more trimmed Nea Nicuță's star, decorated by Burghelea, famous painter, to whom we rub the paints among stones only to look at him for entire days as he used to take out saints, angels, devils, horses and dragons from nothing."

(*Mister Vucea*, Barbu Delavrancea)

4. Mark, by rewriting, the correct form from the following examples: (1 p)

îi va place / îi va plăcea (he/she will like)

te-ai complăce / te-ai complăcea (he/she will indulge)

ar apare / ar apărea (would appear)

ți-ar pare bine / ți-ar părea bine (will like)

aș prevedea / aș prevedea (I would foresee)

5. Find the equivalent of the following expressions: a-și pune pofta în cui (don't you think you may get it), a bate apa-n piuă (wasting time), a-l lua gura pe dinainte (to crack the bell), a face zile fripte (cuiva) (to play hell to somebody), a se face luntre și punte (to make punts and decks). (1 p)

6. Find the literary doublet of every regional element: curechi (cabbage), colb (dust), sfădit (quarrelled), ciurdă (herd of cattle), pâclă (fog), tină (mud). (1 p)

7. Write a dialogue to a friend whom you met after a year, randomly. (4 p)

Table 1. Obtained results by students at initial assessment

Marks	No. of students –Experimental sample	Per cents	No. of students –control sample	Per cents
10	0	0%	0	0%
9	0	0%	0	0%
8	2	17%	1	8%
7	5	25%	4	33,5%
6	3	41%	4	33,5%
5	2	17%	3	25%

From obtained results interpretation following the application of the initial test, from students' systematic observation and results at learning, I reached the conclusion that there are major differences between the two samples.

3.3.2. *In formative stage of the experiment* I organized didactic activities, according to mental disabilities students' psychological development particularities from the experimental sample, I followed the working methodology improvement by introduction of some strategies concerning the communication competence development. I applied a great variety of strategies, reported at grade level, respecting the curriculum. By

the analysis of assessment tests results I had the possibility to adopt ameliorative differentiated pedagogical measures. On the control sample, the working style was an ordinary one, not being influenced by the independent variable.

I observed in students' behaviour more tolerance to the person he/she "exposes himself/herself", there have been amplified the collaboration and cooperation, the team activity, being trained and stimulated, in this way, students with lower results.

3.3.3. In *the final assessment stage* I applied a final assessment test, identical for the two groups (experimental and control ones), in order to obtain the school performances of these ones. In order to be able to compare the results, this one was conceived, like the initial assessment test, under the form of 7 items. The test included items that targeted: establishing the correspondent of element from A column with the one from B column, explanation of some neologisms, analysing some pleonasm, formulation of sentences with different meanings of given words, identification of some jargon elements, but also of some archaisms, achievement of a reading diary.

Final evaluation test

1. Associate the elements from A column with those from B column: (1 p)

School leaving examination (Bacalaureat exam)	Mihail Sadoveanu
Voda's mare	Barbu Delavrancea
Harap-Alb's Tale	Ion Luca Caragiale
Mister Vucea	Ion Creangă

2. Explain the following neologisms: bliț (blitz), moto (motto), papion (bow), stres (stress), șezlong (deck chair). (1 p)

3. Analyse the structure of the following pleonasm and point out the error: s-a întors înapoi (she/he came back), coboară jos (she/he comes down), main protagonist, întrajutorare reciprocă (mutual supportiveness), au conviețuit împreună (they lived together). (1 p)

4. Build up sentences in which the words *casă* (house), *a descărca* (discharge), *limbă* (language) to be used with their own meaning (the basic and the secondary one) and with their figurative meaning. (1 p)

5. Point out the meaning of the underlined word in the given text and explain why the speaker is using it: (1 p)

"- Parol! chiar eu l-am cumpărat! zice tanti Mița." ("I give you my word! I bought it myself! Auntie Mita says")

(*Mr. Goe...*, Ion Luca Caragiale)

6. Underline the archaisms from the following poem: (1 p)

"Voi sunteți acolo, viteji pârcălabi, ("You are there valiant chief magistrates,
Și voi, preacinstiților vornici, And you, honourable governors,
Statornici în cinstea de lege și țară Law firm in honour and country
În focul credinței statornici." Firm in the fire of fate.")

(*Poems*, Octavian Goga)

7. Write a reading diary where you write about the texts you read having as topic “Scenes from yesterday and today life.” (Tests can be either from the textbook or from supplementary reading) (4 p)

Table 2. *Students obtained results at final assessment*

Marks	Nr. of students – Experimental sample	Per cents	No. of students– Control sample	Per cents
10	0	0%	0	0%
9	3	25%	1	8%
8	6	50%	5	42%
7	2	17%	4	33%
6	1	8%	2	17%
5	0	0%	0	0%

4. Results

Results of the research have been analysed and interpreted, with the purpose of performance increase in the unfolded activity. According to the results obtained in both the assessment tasks, there can be concluded a progress increase of students from the experimental sample, due to the application of development of communication competences strategies by means of literary text. The analysis and interpretation of obtained data points out an evolution in their oral and written expression, in vocabulary activation and emphasis, students being glad of an efficient communication based on collaboration, mutual help, and initiative.

In order to obtain information concerning these students' knowledge and competence level, but also the degree of involvement in the educative process, I used the following research instruments: knowledge pedagogical tests, worksheets. These instruments have been adapted to contents and targeted objectives in the research, but also to students' particularities.

The research hypothesis: *if I used didactic strategies in the instructive-educative process during the Romanian language and literature classes at students with mental disabilities by means of literary text, creating an enjoyable working atmosphere, these would influence the performance and school success, more exactly would determine vocabulary development and enrichment, training in free discussions, but also their oral and written expression*, has been confirmed through a comparative analysis of data of qualitative type obtained by achievement of the two assessment tests: initial and final ones.

5. Discussions

As a result of this study, I ascertained that vocabulary enrichment is achieved by explanation of the unknown words, by presentation of the object or image of the object, by synonyms, antonyms. The communication precision and expressivity are given in the highest measure by the quality of used vocabulary. Vocabulary enrichment is one of the priority tasks which are achieved as part of all subjects from school.

6. Conclusions

The participant students from this research, homogenous as age and with the same type of mental deficiency, have achieved successfully certain tasks according to their nature and difficulty or the students' intellectual potential. The application of instruction strategies specific to the development of communication competence by means of literary text during the Romanian language and literature classes led to a more efficient and faster consolidation of taught knowledge, establishing cooperation and communication relationships among these ones.

Due to the obtained results at the tests applied to students with mental disabilities, this study will constitute the reason of a larger research, more complex, constituting in the way the component elements of a pedagogical model of formation of communication competence at students with mental disabilities by means of literary text.

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