

**EDU WORLD 2018**  
**The 8<sup>th</sup> International Conference**

**HOW CAN INTEGRATED ACTIVITIES IN PRIMARY SCHOOL  
INCREASE VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE**

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***Abstract***

The present paper approaches a scientific research carried out in primary school, during the Communication in Romanian Language class. The study started from the idea that within the activities of the preparatory class, for a good understanding of the semantic structure of the vocabulary, some activities are more efficient, more in the students' sense, in the situation in which they would unfold under the form of integrated didactic activities. It is known that children get bored very quickly and that is why the content must be taught in a more attractive way, which is to arouse their curiosity and the desire to learn more about a specific field. While linking and moving from one domain to another, children do not even feel that they are learning more things at the same time, receiving information from several categories of activities, things that are related to them because of the dexterity and creativity of the teacher to satisfy them in harmony, to make them pass through various games, songs or simple riddles. We focused this research on Integrated Activities in C.L.R. - Communication in Romanian Language, addressing the theme and the specifics of the paper. This area is very useful for the student's personal and social development, for vocabulary development, being at the age where he has many questions about what is happening around him, people, animals, plants, planets, and why not the world of disproving dinosaurs.

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**Keywords:** Integrated activities, vocabulary, semantics.



## 1. Introduction

In order to make students understand the overwhelming role of the Romanian language in the formation of their personality as a way of serving in all communication relations, we must first make sure that they have an active contribution to the discovery and acquisition of the facts and notions of language.

It is well known that the effectiveness of the lessons is evident through its outcomes, results that concern not only the correct and rapid transfer of information during the lessons, but also ways of acquiring knowledge, skills and abilities by the student so that they can benefit from them independently, in both creative and living activities.

The level of teaching Romanian language depends to a great extent on the competence, the ability and especially the methods and procedures that we use to help students acquire knowledge and develop skills and abilities. In the following research, we have tried to demonstrate how a harmonious combination of the traditional and modern methods can provide the grammar lessons with an active and, implicitly, interesting framework for the pupils.

“The development of language in preschools coincides with the development of communication capacities through specific activities aimed at perfecting children’s speech in a phonetic aspect, expanding the sphere of active and passive vocabulary and strengthening grammatically correct forms” (Lazăr, 2018, p. 12).

In primary school, starting with the preparatory class, language learning has, first of all, a practical purpose, i.e. to teach students to speak and write correctly. With the help of grammar, the students learn to use the language correctly, to understand the expressive nuances, the semantic richness of the language. The students acquire literary, correct, rich and expressive language, being able to use it under all circumstances.

Current curricular requirements claim that the study of the Romanian language at primary school level should be based on various grammar exercises, comparisons, classifications, generalizations, leading to conscious learning of the rules, removing the mechanical grasp. As a consequence, the new curriculum avoids the use of many grammatical rules and lays a special emphasis on practical applications mainly embedded in integrated activities that develop the flexibility of thinking and ensure the passage through all curricular areas, for the acquisition of the competencies concerned. “An essential feature of learning language notions is the resumption, in each class, of a higher plan than previously learned. Such a system of sharing the volume of knowledge in school curricula is called concentric. It takes into account the particularities of the school age, its possibilities of understanding, the concrete-intuitive character of its thinking” (Popescu, Logel, & Stroescu-Logel, 2003, p. 67).

## 2. Problem Statement

We carried out our research in a primary school, part of the public educational system. Most of the students have reached the age of 6, which means that, the next school year they will be in the 1st grade. Therefore, the group of subjects required for the research consists of two preparatory classes: the experimental group - Preparatory class B - 20 students and the control group - Preparatory class A - 20 students.

The study started from the idea that within the activities of the preparatory class, for a good understanding of the semantic structure of the vocabulary, some activities are more efficient, more in the students' sense, in the situation in which they would unfold under the form of integrated didactic activities. It is known that children get bored very quickly and that is why the content must be taught in a more attractive way, which is to arouse their curiosity and the desire to learn more about a specific field. While linking and moving from one domain to another, children do not even feel that they are learning more things at the same time, receiving information from several categories of activities, things that are related to them because of the dexterity and creativity of the teacher to satisfy them in harmony, to make them pass through various games, songs or simple riddles.

We focused this research on Integrated Activities in C.L.R. - Communication in Romanian Language, addressing the theme and the specifics of the paper. This area is very useful for the student's personal and social development, for vocabulary development, being at the age where he has many questions about what is happening around him, people, animals, plants, planets, and why not the world of disproving dinosaurs.

### **3. Research Questions**

We based our research on the following hypothesis: If the lessons of Communication in Romanian Language were to be carried out in the form of integrated activities, then the knowledge of children related to the vocabulary of the Romanian language would be more profound, influencing considerably their interest in this field.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Starting from the hypothesis set above, during a school year for two Preparatory Classes in primary school, we have planned to carry out several integrated activities, in all forms of organization for the language and communication field, with the purpose of using the results obtained at the end of the school year, to contribute to enriching the luggage of knowledge and information of the children of the preparatory classes in the following school years.

We took into account the following objectives:

- assess of the initial knowledge acquired in the previous pre-school levels in the field of communication;
- apply training and improvement methods in integrated activities;
- build work tasks by gathering information from several fields of activity;
- help students develop skills such as: observe, describe, explain, and self-correct in the current speech;
- highlight the effects produced during the design and development of integrated teaching activities;
- record, compare and interpret the results obtained in the initial, formative and summative tests, aiming to highlight the progress made by the pupils;

## 5. Research Methods

For choosing the research methods, we considered the following:

- the use of objective research methods, i.e. methods by which the responses of the subjects to the direct or indirect action of the various external stimuli can be observed and measured;
- the use of methods that make it possible to systematically address the phenomenon investigated;
- the use of a complementary system of methods to investigate the phenomenon, both in terms of its general and specific manifestations.

For collecting the data, we used methods such as:

- methods of collecting research data: the method of observation, the method of tests, the method of the conversation, the psycho-pedagogical experiment method, the method of analysis of students' activity products;
- methods of quantifying the data: counting of results, answers, and students with certain results, categories of difficulties, qualitative interpretation through various analyzes; classification, ordering, hierarchy of results, of children, in different stages of the experiment; comparing the results of the children in the experimental group with those of the children in the control group; reporting to standards, standards;
- mathematical and statistical methods of data collection and processing: preparation of results tables, quantitative interpretation of accumulated findings (graphical representations).

As we are living in a continuous evolution in education, with more and more innovations and methods, we have continuously integrated the traditional methods and the child-centred active and participatory methods within the activities.

### 5.1. Initial stage of the research

As a first step, we aimed to establish the level of knowledge of the students in the field of communication, which was acquired during their pre-school years of study. The level was tested using a set of initial assessment sheets, in the first month of the school year, for the two classes: experimental and control. Initial assessment tests include exercises with different and well-thought-out items, set in advance, with an average degree of difficulty, including the most important aspects to be noticed and knowledge of the subject matter involved in the communication activities. The results obtained from this evaluation were recorded and centralized in the specific tables, following the percentage to be compared with the final stage. The ranking was based on the difficulty level.

### 5.2. Experimental stage of the research

At this stage, the integrated activities, where one of the fields is Language and Communication, have been carried out, using a specific sample in order to be able to fulfil the objectives of this research and to reach the goal set at the beginning.

All the activities have been structured according to the season, the characteristics of nature and the knowledge needs of the students, aiming at helping students find out more details and information about

the surrounding environment and everything related to the semantic structure of the vocabulary. During the school year we have developed more integrated activities, having the didactic game as a dominant form of performing the activities.

Following the initial assessment tests, we found that students have a wealth of knowledge about the structure of sentences, words, or syllables. They know and can describe objects, enumerate, classify components of surrounding objects, describe situations, and draw the most important conclusions, but they do not all ask questions about what they are observing.

At this stage, a pleasant and attractive work style was promoted, under the sign of the game, combining intuitive and verbal methods, active-participatory strategies, integrating didactic games into inter and trans-disciplinary activities, selecting interesting and attractive games. During the class activity, we paid special attention to the dynamic, active aspect of the knowledge, aiming at making it a long-lasting feature of the students. We have found that some students are passive in the activities, do not announce their participation and are pleased with their peers' answers.

Depending on the themes of the year, we planned to design and prepare the evaluation of integrated activities in thematic projects that provide differentiated learning based on experience and curiosity in which the student experiences new things.

As a continuation of Communication in Romanian Language activities implemented with the experimental group, we decided to carry out some outdoor activities, together with students in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. These activities made possible the direct contact with the living world, giving students the opportunity to make observations on the objects and phenomena in a natural state, socialize, make friends, integrate into school, especially as some of the students have brothers / sisters in the partner class.

The activities during for the Communication in Romanian Language class have been combined with integrated activities, throughout the school year, from other areas of study: Mathematics and Environmental Exploration (MEM), Visual Arts and Practical Skills (AV / AP), Music and Movement (MM), and Personal Development (DP).

As we all know children's' need for knowledge, but also their desire to play as much as possible throughout the school year, we have developed more activities in the form of games, using, in many cases, the active-participatory methods, centred on the student. These methods can satisfy children's' curiosity, the need for knowledge, with an emphasis on the student. They also help develop students' democratic thinking, as they practice critical thinking and understand that when they analyze a story character, his/her behaviour, a fact, an idea, an event, they actually criticize the behaviour, the idea, the fact, not the character of the story himself/herself. "Organization of school activity either in frontal or collective form (work with the whole class, year of study, etc.) either in teams (micro groups) or individual or combinatorial, as suggested by the team teaching experiment (based, among others , a flexible and mobile grouping of pupils with a transition from activities with large groups to small, homogenous groups and then to individual activities) inevitably require a methodology appropriate to these organizational forms" (Cerghit, 2006, p. 36).

After using each method, we can reach the outcomes that students perceive and make them responsible for solving future work tasks. With the help of these methods, students learn how to share their ideas, become more confident, become responsible for their ideas and actions; they can handle real situations and express their point of view freely. Methodological quality is an aspect of opportunity, dose, combinatorial methods or hypostasis of methods. "To say first of all that a method is better than another

(or that a method is desirable), without regard to the context in which the method is (or becomes) effective, it is a dangerous and even meaningless assertion” (Cucuș, 2006, p. 288).

As specific methods in this research, included in the integrated activities, we used the Cube method, the Mysterious Craze, the Pyramid method, the Mime, the Lotus Flower, the Thinking Hats, The Cluster, The Graphic Diary, Brainstorming, The Stellar Explosion, and the Gallery Tour method.

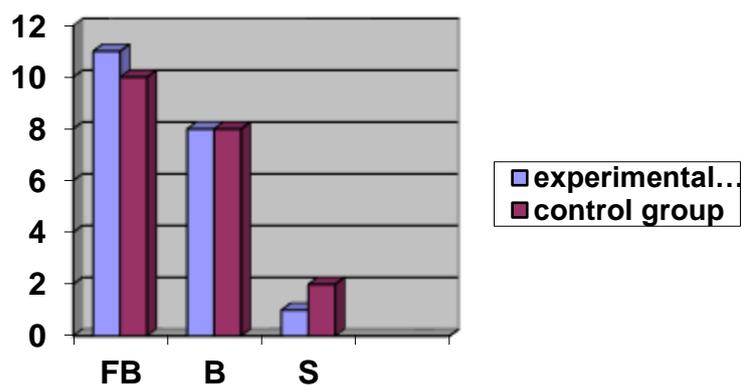
### 5.3. Final stage of the research

The final stage, or the control stage, consisted in the application of the evaluation tests, somehow similar to the ones used during the initial stage, but adding new content elements, as well as a higher degree of difficulty. This stage was similarly performed for both the experimental and the control group, and all the results have been centralized and finally compared to those obtained during the initial stage of the research.

At this stage, we used as a means of evaluation two worksheets and a didactic game. Both the worksheets and the game have been specifically designed to highlight the semantic structure of the vocabulary, taking into account the theme of the work and the research. We used evaluation items specific to the field of Communication in Romanian Language, and also from other subjects, such as: Reading, Mathematics and Environmental Exploration (MEM), Religion, Visual Arts and Practical Skills (AV / AP), Music and Movement (MM), Personal Development (DP)

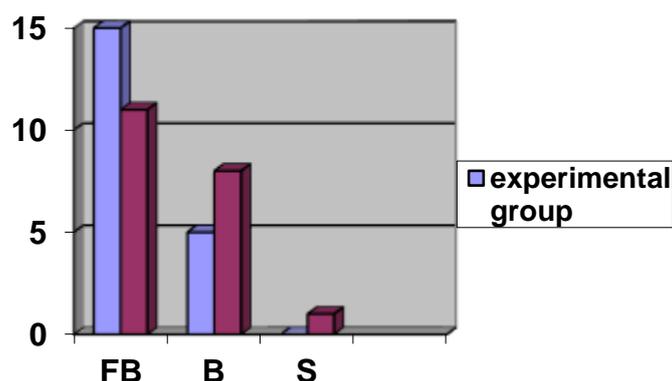
## 6. Findings

Following the initial testing and the centralization of the results obtained during three tests, the following results were obtained, as shown in the Figure 01 and 02 below:



**Figure 01.** Histogram representation of results after initial evaluation (FB – Very well, B – Well, S – Satisfactory)

Following the final testing and the centralization of the results obtained during three tests, the following results were obtained, as shown in the tables below:



**Figure 02.** Histogram representation of results after final evaluation (**FB – Very well, B – Well, S – Satisfactory**)

## 7. Conclusion

The objectives of the present research were achieved at the end. The hypothesis set at the beginning of the research, i.e. ‘If the lessons of Communication in Romanian Language were to be carried out in the form of integrated activities, then the knowledge of children related to the vocabulary of the Romanian language would be more profound, influencing considerably their interest in this field’ has been fully confirmed. As C-tin Cucuș synthesized “we must not give up anything that has been valuable and effective over time, but add new elements that will bring improvements, adapt them to the changes imposed by society, to be receptive to the new, creatively applying each method” (Cucuș, 2001, p. 148) .

After applying the formative experiment, we noticed that the experimental group experienced a faster increase in the deepening of the knowledge related to language and communication in particular, compared to the control group. We observed the evolution of the students over time, making summative assessments after certain periods of time, thus being able to better observe the evolution of the students in the experimental group compared to the control group.

The hypothesis that was confirmed, as evidenced by the results obtained from the experimental research. Statistical data confirm that all students in the experimental group have achieved superior qualitative results compared to the control group, in terms of developing and acquiring knowledge of everything around them, and mastering the application of the phonetic, analytical-synthetic method.

Also, qualitative aspects of students’ behaviour can also be observed, students becoming more receptive to activities, with a focus of attention for a longer period of time. From the comparisons made in the research diagrams and the analytical tables, these improvements can be distinctly observed.

The experiment has demonstrated the viability of language and communication activities focused on vocabulary exercises integrated in other disciplines whenever we have the opportunity, the performance students give when they are trained in various games, experiments, exits in nature and even the integration of more activities from different areas of study, creating a link between them, through the fun games. “The teacher must be convinced that the problem of language and language cultivation is the most important part of the child's intellectual education. The rich vocabulary becomes the instrument and the support of the ideas, the originality and the creativity of the individual in his life and activity” (Popescu, Logel, & Stroescu-Logel, p. 83).

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