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**INTEGRATING READING AND READING SKILLS IN THE
ROMANIAN CURRICULA – A CASE-STUDY**

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Abstract

Reading is one of the four skills included in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. It is seen not only as a skill when it comes to foreign languages, but also when it comes to mother languages. Lately, one has noticed a decrease of the students' interest in reading, no matter the level or the age. As far as we are concerned, we are trying to analyze how reading is integrated in the Romanian curricula. There are a lot of studies regarding the theories of reading. In order to increase motivation for reading, we should first see which the factors that may help students read more are or the factors that prevent students from reading. This paper will take into account one of these, which is the Romanian curriculum and how it is structured so as to integrate reading. Does it motivate students? Are there included works appropriate? The methodology that the paper uses involves a desk-research taking into account the Romanian curricula as it was designed for teaching Romanian; we will emphasize the way reading and reading skills are integrated. The research aims at being a synthesis of how reading and reading skills are integrated in the Romanian curricula and of the way students perceive these; we also aim at formulating some propositions in order to improve students' reading skill and to increase their motivation for reading.

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1. Introduction

Reading has always been an activity involving more than one side of human activity; it has been a way of disseminating knowledge and information, a way of enriching cultures, but also a way of spending one's time in a pleasant manner being a leisure time activity. It has been seen as a "seduction, rebellion or

obsession” (Manguel, 1996) along the time. Reading belongs to any cultural space and to any historic epoch and as it is so ancient, it has been the subject of many different changes of point of view along the time. For instance, Romania has seen reading differently in different periods of its history to talk only about its recent history: if during the communist period, it was seen as a refuge, a way of trying to maintain oneself in a world of freedom, after 1989, reading has changed more and more.

People having the custom to read during Ceausescu’s time have become less and less interested in reading as TV, newspapers, internet started to provide plenty of information which was on one side easier to understand and on the other side, easier to find and less expensive. Statistics prove thus that reading and especially literature reading have decreased nowadays in Romania although Romanians’ favourite reading is represented by fiction books (15,59 %), followed by general knowledge books (14,32%) (Cât, cum si ce citesc românii, octombrie 2012 (www.iwox.ro)).

Nevertheless, researchers belonging to different fields such as sciences of education, psychology, philology continue to advocate for the importance of reading; so, if its importance for people’s becoming remains the same, where should we look for the causes of the less and less number of people reading literature or simply reading generally something just for fun? Could we blame it only on the new technologies or is it something else somewhere behind which might be changed in order to make people and especially young people draw nearer reading?

Our working hypothesis is that young people could be more attracted to reading and that they might develop their reading skills continuously if the school curricula were designed with this purpose in view and that it is necessary that something should be done taking into account the present-day situation as it is revealed by international surveys:

“Students in Bulgaria and Romania had a considerable lower average achievement than their counterparts in all other participating EU-27 countries. The mean scores in these countries were 60 points lower than the EU-27 average. These countries had the lowest results in 2000 and their average scores remained approximately the same in 2009.” (Teaching Reading in Europe: Contexts, Policies and Practices, European Commission, Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2011, p. 15)

2. Paper Theoretical Foundation and Related Literature

As “reading is nowadays a current but also diverse practice, we assist –maybe as a consequence of the encounter with the omnipresence of the picture- at the constitution of a new culture of reading”(Muresanu, M., *Literatura ca discurs mediat*, Editura Universitatii Al.I.Cuza, Iasi, 1996, p. 11). According to Muresanu, there are three fields continuously interacting as far as reading is concerned: **the text, the reader as a text according to his expectations and the encounter between the reader and the text**. When teaching literature in school, if we, as teachers, desire to facilitate reading and to develop reading skills, we have to take into account all these three fields.

Sofia Dima considers that reading can be seen from three perspectives (Dima, 2000): as an intellectual activity, as a socio-cultural activity and as a social institution. Reading as an intellectual activity refers to the “perception, structuring and relating the signs among them” (Dima, 2000), while reading as a socio-cultural activity is a “delayed pseudo-communication” (Dima, 2000). The third perspective under which Dima sees reading is as a “social-institution” and it is this last aspect which

concerns us; in its quality of “social institution”, reading has more peculiar characteristics (Dima, 2000): **it is taught and learnt in school**; it has special places where it can be practiced such as libraries and classrooms; it has a socio-economic part related to the activity of publishing and selling; it is a cultural habit operating hierarchies among texts; it is a continuous assessment process changing in the same time with groups’ and times’ mentalities; it is a way of enriching the reader’s cultural horizon; **it reveals habits, preferences and behaviours of the public reflecting a constant or changing reading mentality**; it sets interpretation norms according to different factors; **it has different forms according to the aims or to the existing conditioning, varying from individual momentary mood up to the social or professional reading requirement**; it can join, through the text, different times and cultural spaces; it can be subjected to different interpretations given the number of readers and their diversity.

Among these characteristics, there are three which we are interested in within the frame of this paper: first of all, reading is *taught and learnt in school* which is, maybe, the most important statement as it reveals the school and teachers’ responsibility related to reading and developing reading skills; the documents by which the Romanian education system is supposed to do that is the curricula. It also falls also under the school’s responsibility to realize that in time, *habits, preferences and behaviours related to reading are changing* and to decide to change the curricula too, so as to create equivalences between the new reading preferences and habits and the curricula. The third characteristic to be referred to is *the conditioning making reading a requirement, a must in school* which might affect its status of leisure time activity.

Thus, the documents we need to take into account in order to better understand how reading and reading skills development are integrated in teaching/learning at school in Romania are the national curricula. The age groups taken into account for the overview of the national curricula in Romania are: 10, 11 to 14, 14-16, 16-18. We are speaking here of *primary* education (10), *secondary* education (11-14) and of *high-school* education (15-18).

3. Methodology

In point of methodology, we aim at achieving an overview of the national curricula in Romania with respect to how reading and reading skills are integrated and/or promoted within the frame of the Romanian public system of education.

According to the *Education Common Framework* (Education, 2013), Romanian Language and Literature is taught in the 4th form (to pupils of 10 years old) 5 hours/week. **The curriculum** was designed according to the Common Framework for Developing Communication Skills in Mother Language. This framework takes into account: the Literary Framework for Teachers, LiFT (Witte, 2009), this document being used to design the necessary skills for reading and PIRLS Assessment Framework (PIRLS , 2011), involving the progress of the reading skills at the end of the primary education.

The curriculum includes 4 categories of information: **general skills** (oral and written comprehension, oral and written production of messages), **specific skills** (derived of the general skills), **learning activities** (non-compulsory tasks by which specific skills are developed), **contents** (speech acts, grammar, typologies of texts) and **methodology suggestions** (meant to guide the teacher to develop the students’ skills). Reading has to do with the **written comprehension**.

The curriculum for students from 11 to 14 years old (Ordonul Ministrului Educatiei Nationale, nr. 5097/09.09.2009, 2009) takes into account the same 4 general skills as the previous curriculum, that for the younger students. **The texts** are either literary or non-literary at this stage. Apart from other topics of interests, this curriculum mentions that it aims at developing skills for **reading**. The curriculum includes not only general skills, but also **values and attitudes** which should be developed in students, such as: arousing the interest for and the pleasure of reading, as well as developing the autonomous reflexive thinking related to the written/oral messages.

The curriculum for students from 15 to 18 years old (the IXth, the Xth, the XIth, the XIIth forms) involves partially different **general skills**: using Romanian in order to comprehend written or oral messages, using different types of analysis to comprehend literary/non-literary texts, expressing for/against opinions. The curriculum includes not only general skills, but also **values and attitudes** which should be developed in students, such as: arousing the interest for and the pleasure of reading, as well as developing the autonomous reflexive, critical thinking related to the written/oral messages. **The contents** fall into two categories: *Literature; Language and Communication*. Romanian Language and Literature is taught in the 9th and the Xth form form (to pupils of 15, 16 years old) 3 hours/week.

The curricula for students from 16 to 18 years old (Anexa nr. 2 la Ordinul ministrului educației și cercetării nr. 5959 / 22.12.2006, PROGRAME ȘCOLARE CICLUL SUPERIOR AL LICEULUI, LIMBA ȘI LITERATURA ROMÂNĂ, CLASA A XII-A, Aprobat prin ordinul ministrului Nr. 3252 / 13.02.2006, 2006) (the XIth, the XIIth forms) are unitary in point of general skills, of the **values and attitudes** which are promoted, as well as point of the two categories of contents: *Literature; Language and Communication*. It emphasizes among other aspects: developing advanced reading skills (synthetizing features of a literary movement, of a literary period...) being based on a chronological approach.

4. Results

In order to notice how reading skills are developed according to the Romanian Curricula, we followed contrastively the skills required for all the age groups included as well as the examples of activities related to reading included by the curricula.

Thus, for the 4th form (students of 10 years old), the Romanian curriculum includes specific skills related to reading as well as learning activities, such as those presented in Table no. 1:

Table 1. Specific skills related to reading as well as learning activities - 10 years old students

Specific Skills	Examples of activities
- expressing simple conclusions after reading	- pair activities consisting in mutual questions; - comparing and contrasting some elements in a text by a Venn diagram; - using a toy/tool after reading the instructions.
- associating elements in a text with the students' own experience	- designing projects, posters on the relations between the real and the imaginary worlds; - rephrasing messages from different points of view
- looking for specific information in a text to support an opinion	- mini-debates; - drawing lists about pertinent aspects of the text; - problem-solving
- assessing text elements leading to a deep understanding of the	- critical thinking;

text	
- showing interest for literary and information reading	- projects involving information about extra-curricular activities (for example, trips, contests etc) - meetings with writers ; - Contests related to reading.

The texts to be used involve about 800 words and belong to different typologies: narrative, descriptive texts, short poetry, information and functional texts: tables, diagrams, maps, plans, postcards, invitations or, if possible SMS and e-mails.

For the Vth up to the VIIIth form (students from 11 to 14 years old), the Romanian curriculum includes specific skills related to reading as well as learning activities similar to the ones presented in the table below:

Table 2. Specific skills related to reading as well as learning activities – 11 to 14 years old students

Specific Skills	Examples of activities
- finding the main ideas after reading a text (V) - identifying general and detailed organization elements in a text (VI) - identifying literary from non-literary texts (VII) - answering specific tasks in order to show the general and detailed comprehension of the text (VIII)	- Analytic activities: recognizing, grouping, motivating, describing; - Synthesis activities :changing, filling in, giving examples; - Identifying the structure of an epic, lyrical, 1 text or of a play; - Identifying the differences between different species etc;
- Recognizing narration, description and dialogue in a text (V) - Finding literary procedures in a poem (VI) - Finding the parts of an epic text or literary procedures in a lyrical text (VII) - Identifying the expressive value of some morpho-syntactical categories, of means to enrich the vocabulary, of stylistic elements (VIII)	
- Finding new words or phrases in a text (V) - Recognizing the artistic value of words and phrases (VI) - Recognizing the correctness and the expressiveness of grammatical elements (VII)	
- finding the elements related to grammar in the text: verbs, nouns, etc (V) - finding the elements related to subordination, coordination in a sentence (VI)	
- using different reading strategies	
- expressing likes or dislikes, taking into account cultural or ethical values (VIII)	

In point of **contents**, reading is seen from three points of view: *The Book as a Cultural Object*, *Elements of Literary Theory* (narration, description, dialogue, literary procedures, literary genres and species (partially), and *Texts* (*Non-literary texts* -the news, the train schedule, a show programme, the newspaper/magazine article, the advertisement text- and *Literary texts*).

The texts to be used involve about 2 pages and 5-7 literary texts including excerpts from Romanian well-known writers (in the Vth form), 6-8 literary texts including excerpts from Romanian well-known writers (in the VIth, the VIIth and the VIIIth forms).

The approach of the reading is different in the IXth form: the **texts** are thematically grouped and there are 8-10 works to be studied, belonging to different literary genres, epochs, Romanian authors. They depend on the teacher's choice, but there is a list of suggested texts from different cultures.

As far as the skills are concerned, there is a grading from the IXth to the XIIth forms; in the Xth form, there are at least 13 literary texts belonging at least half of them to Romanian authors. As far as the literary texts are concerned, it is important to be an **exchange among the students**.

Table 3. Specific skills related to reading as well as learning activities – 15 to 18 years old students

Specific Skills	Examples of activities
- Using different techniques aiming at comprehending a literary/non-literary text (IX)(XII)	- debates - case-studies
- Identifying the topic of the text (IX)	- text analysis
- comparing and attitudes and ideas (IX)	
- Analysing the structure and the form of the studied texts (IX)	
- Identifying the main features of lyrical, epical texts and of plays; (X)	
- Comparing the features of communication in literary/non-literary texts (IX)	- debates - case-studies
- Comparing films and literary works (IX)	- text analysis
- Using different literary concepts in analysing texts (IX)	
- Comprehending texts by means of the students' own experience (XII)	

5. Discussions

Comparing the curricula for all the three age groups taken into account, one can easily observe certain constants: all of the three emphasize the same types of contents, that is *Literature* and *Language and Communication*. As far as the shared values and attitudes are concerned, they differ slightly, their differentiation coming with the students' age: if for the youngest, they aim at arousing the interest in/the pleasure for reading, for teenagers, they switch to the development of autonomous reflexive thinking or even to the autonomous reflexive critical thinking. The skill corresponding to reading is for all the categories the written comprehension of the text. The differences come from the number of texts to be studied varying from 5 to 13, their length or the concepts of literary theory involved at the respective level.

Apart from the general issues, there are also a category of particular remarks which can be made out of the analysis of the above mentioned curricula, especially in point of **contents**. For instance, there is a list of compulsory authors (regarded as being the most representative ones for the Romanian culture) without compulsory works attached; however, students have to read and study one work by each author, but there is no statement telling how this work should be chosen and methodological reasons show that the choice is not the students' but their teachers' as the available teaching time does not allow studying deeply more than one single work belonging to an author. Most of the writers classified by the history of literature among the „classics” belong to the XIXth century Romanian culture and so are the realities described which brings out some difficulty in reading their work. On the other hand, specialists suggest that pupils should be let „choose their own reading materials whenever possible and [be provided] with a wide selection of texts”(Teaching Reading in Europe: contexts, policies and practices, Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2011, p. 41).

In order to increase **motivation** for reading and to develop the students' reading skills, they should be able to find connections between what they know, what they are and what they read or, if the activities suggested by the curriculum are quite generous and allow students to get involved actively in their learning, things are different concerning the relations a teacher may establish between analysing

compulsory literary texts and analysing other types of texts on one hand and between literary compulsory authors and recent authors better known by students from their extra-curricular reading. Moreover, students should be shown that reading as well as literature in general are nothing else but life facets and they could learn more about themselves by learning more about fictional works and characters.

Another remark which can be done refers to the works' study according to **the field** the students study, that is the differences in point of curriculum for the Romanian language and literature between students studying sciences and students studying humanities: the first and the most important difference is related to the number of works studied; the others are related to grammar issues, to writing the foreword for a book, discussing the favourite author's books or specialised languages. Consequently, the differences are minor in the contents.

The curriculum does not clearly propose **reading promotion strategies or techniques for promoting reading for fun**, this kind of reading being mentioned only as a social value to be indirectly acquired. **The inter-disciplinary guidelines** for promoting reading are related to understanding literary works by comparing them with works coming from different artistic fields such as cinema or painting; this idea is mentioned only for the high-school curricula and it could be regarded as a great opportunity to bring students closer to reading, but the methodological are rather scarce.

Another issue which we consider important is that of **new reading technologies** and the possibility of integrating/using them in order to develop reading skills, but unfortunately they are not even mentioned.

6. Conclusions

The review of the national curricula for the Romanian Language and Literature for three different groups of age (10, 11 to 14, 14-16, 16-18) that is students belonging to *primary* education (10), *secondary* education (11-14) and of *high-school* education (15-18) in order to see how reading skills are developed shows some points in which they could be improved; we could mention here: the contents, the increasing of students' reading motivation, the possibility of making a difference in the science versus humanities Romanian Language and Literature curriculum as well as of emphasizing more the reading for fun, the interdisciplinary study which might connect literature to other arts or taking into account the new technologies which, instead of preventing students from reading, could help them read.

We strongly consider that curricula should be revised more often and that steering documents should generally focus as much as possible on the students' interests and personal development especially when it comes to reading and developing reading skills as these kinds of skills are useful not only during school or for exams, but for the individual's long life development and progress.

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