BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA

FACULTY OF PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES

DOCTORAL SCHOOL „DIDACTICS. TRADITION. DEVELOPMENT. INNOVATION"

ABSTRACT OF DOCTORAL THESIS

EFFECTIVE METHODS AND PRACTICES IN ROMANIAN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING FOR MINORITIES

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Cluj-Napoca

2024

CONTENTS

Terms and keywords:

minority elementary classes, Romanian language lesson, teachers'/pupils' opinion, traditional methods, language learning methods, the Gopo Method, use of board games

Summary

Introduction

I wished to learn Romanian as a child, but I didn't seem to have a chance. Romanian was not spoken in the village where I lived (Ser, Satu Mare county). There were two or three families of Romanian nationality, but they spoke Hungarian, just like the other inhabitants. When talking to each other, they didn't use the standard language, but they communicated in such a way that Romanian seemed to be another kind of Hungarian language, only a little more interesting, because they used words like „porodică", „colompire", „lipideu", etc.

Unfortunately, this is also the case of the Hungarian-speaking pupils in some localities. They live in an isolated environment where they cannot practise the language outside of the school. The majority of teachers recognize the need for introducing new methods of language teaching and the need for motivating the pupils (Molnár, 2018). In order to achieve this, it is indispensable for the teacher to have positive attitude, empathy, to be prepared and professionally dedicated. „We can only hope for substantial change if the relationship between teacher and student changes: the teacher transforms from a provider of information into a stimulator of learning. Schools need to be transformed into learning communities that take into account the particularities of each student." (J. Freiberg, 2013, 399). Therefore, in order to make a positive change, both teachers' and students' honest opinions and suggestions are needed, as well as the introduction of effective learning methods into the teaching and learning process. In this paper we focus, on one hand, on teachers' opinions and suggestions as well as minority

students' attitudes towards Romanian language teaching/learning, and, on the other hand, we focus on collecting some foreign language learning methods that can make Romanian language lessons more attractive and determine students to be more motivated to learn.

We suggest two methods that we have used in our class. One of these methods is the use of a board game in our Romanian lesson. We created a board game called Relax 2 especially for this purpose. We tested the game first in a summer camp and then in a fourth grade class. The experiment was then continued in five counties of the country, in each case with the use of a control group, in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the Relax 2 game.

The other method is the Gopo Method, with which we conducted a vocabulary enrichment experiment in our class.

The aim of the research

The aims of the research were to find out the opinions of the teachers who teach classes of pupils belonging to national minorities and the desire of the pupils who learn Romanian in Hungarian classes, to present more methods/games for learning Romanian, as well as to use the Gopo Method and the board game Relax 2 in Romanian language lessons.

As a final aim, we would like the results of the research to be of help to the teachers who work with minority classes and thus to make Romanian language learning more attractive for pupils.

The structure of the thesis

The first chapter contains the theoretical background, presenting information about Romanian language teaching among minorities, bilingualism, the teaching-learning process, communication competences, the classification of the Romanian language by levels, as well as methods of foreign language learning and teaching.

The second chapter presents the opinions of the interviewed teachers about Romanian language lessons. These opinions express, among other things, the way they experience the Romanian language lessons, their observations about pupils' attitudes towards the Romanian language, the methods frequently used by these teachers during the Romanian language lessons and the suggestions they have for parents.

The third chapter presents the opinions of Hungarian pupils living in Romania. These are related to the following aspects: their level of Romanian language knowledge, their attitude

towards the Romanian language/Romanian language lesson, the teacher's attitude towards the Romanian language lesson.

The fourth chapter describes how primary school teachers relate to board games and how they use them in the Romanian language lesson.

Chapter five is about the Relax 2 board game which was created by the author, its testing and a developed version of the game that can be used in class. The chapter also contains the pupils' opinion about the game.

The sixth chapter presents the pilot testing of the Relax 2 game. The testing was carried out in fourth grade, the aim of the research was to assess the effectiveness of the board game in terms of vocabulary development and sentence formation skills, and to find out whether the game can be used in the Romanian language lesson. The pilot test prepared the ground for examining the effectiveness of the Relax 2 game on a larger sample.

The seventh chapter presents a research on the effectiveness of the Relax 2 game regarding to vocabulary enrichment and sentence building skills. The game was used in several 3rd grade classes from different counties of the country in the Romanian language lesson, while another parallel 3rd grade class from each county constituted the control group. The chapter presents the research projection and the results obtained.

In **the eighth chapter** the use of the Gopo Method in the Romanian language lesson is described. This chapter presents a research on the effectiveness of the method in terms of vocabulary enrichment and the acquisition of short sentences/short expressions. The experiment took place in a preparatory class.

CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Romanian language teaching for minorities. Bilingualism

The school curriculum for the *Romanian language and literature for Hungarian-language schools and classes* (2017) discipline emphasizes the socio-cultural and linguistic

situation of the pupils, aiming at the formation of autonomous personality and identity building in relation to otherness. Studying Romanian literature also means developing cultural competence, a competence that integrates not only the national culture, but also the national literature in a universal context. The elements of language, literature and culture must be interwoven in a complementary way, so that the language with which the pupil arrives at school undergoes a process of refinement and its dynamics and stylistic diversity could make it possible for him to have a conversation with anyone (Rusu, 2017, 11).

In the book on teaching methodology entitled *Procesul de predare-învăţare a limbii române ca limbă nematernă (RLNM) la ciclul primar. RLNM: P1- ciclul primar* [The teaching-learning process of Romanian as a non-maternal language (RLNM) in primary school] (Platon, E., & Burlacu, D. V., & Sonea, I. S., 2011), the following „golden rules" can be found which help the effective learning of Romanian as a non-maternal language: it is recommended to use only Romanian in Romanian language lessons from the very first lessons; to solve as varied as possible exercises that develop all communication skills (reception of oral and written messages, production of oral and written messages); regarding to the linguistic competence (including grammar and vocabulary), it is recommended to have knowledge of the language and not knowledge about the language, because the former allows speakers to use the specific Romanian structures correctly and efficiently; communicative situations and language in use also promote the easiest possible use of the non-maternal language; students need to know the authentic language, and for this purpose it is recommended to use as many images and audio-visual materials as possible; language knowledge should be anchored in Romanian culture and civilization in order to facilitate the process of integration into the Romanian environment (Platon et al, 2011, 16).

Order no. 5671 from September 10, 2012, requires in article no. 8. the teaching of Romanian language and literature at all levels of pre-university education to be based on minority-specific curriculum and textbooks. The curriculum for communication in Romanian (school curriculum for the discipline *Romanian communication for schools and classes with Hungarian language teaching*, preparatory class, grades I-II, approved by Order of the Minister of National Education No. 3418/19.03.2013.) pays attention to the comparative practice of competences in the pupils' mother tongue and Romanian language, taking into consideration

linguistic differences. In the first half of primary education, attention is paid first to the mother tongue and only after that to the official state language (Tódor, 2019).

In common parlance, the mother tongue is the first language an individual learns from his mother and family. Complications arise in situations where the first language learned is not the language of the biological mother, but of her surrogate or the father. In the latter case, where the father's language predominates in a mixed family, the first language learned by the child is called *paternal language*. For other situations in which the first language is learned from others and not exclusively from the mother, the expression *native language* is used. Given these situations, the term 'language one' (L1) is most often used in language teaching to designate the mother tongue. This is the first language that an individual learns, and it takes into consideration the order of acquisition rather than the person from whom the language is learned. But this term is neither free from problems, as it does not take into account situations in which the individual is exposed from an early age to several languages at the same time, and may even have three „one languages" (Platon, 2021, 192-194).

Some children benefit from two cultures from birth and thus learn two languages at once. This is called bilingualism.

Depending on the stage of ontogenetic development at which the acquisition of a language other than the mother tongue takes place, we distinguish between early bilingualism (early childhood) and late bilingualism (adulthood and senecundity). While children spontaneously acquire lexis, articulatory base and intonational patterns, adults efficiently assimilate normative grammatical aspects and sociolinguistic patterns, with influences of the base language on the pronunciation of the later acquired language.

Depending on the context and form of the acquisition of the non-maternal language, we distinguish: an unsystematic and unorganized acquisition of the second language from the environment in which the child is located (spontaneous bilingualism), language acquisition in a formal, organized setting (organized or institutional bilingualism) and language acquisition by opting for systematic language study (elite bilingualism) (Tódor, 2020).

The teaching-learning process of Romanian as a non-maternal language

The curriculum developed specifically for Hungarian-language classes was designed by Romanian teachers, the majority of whom work with Hungarian minority pupils. Some pupils

belong to isolated linguistic communities, therefore they need to be treated differently in the teaching-learning process. It is also necessary to take into account the quality of the child's primary language acquisition (Rusu, 2017). Hungarian differs from Romanian typologically: Hungarian is an agglutinative language, while Romanian is predominantly inflectional. The fundamental aspects that distinguish the two languages are: phonetic elements, lexical elements, nominal inflection, verb inflection, inflexible word parts and topical elements. These differences can be the source of errors in Hungarian speakers' pronunciation (Pál, 2017). This state has strengthened our conviction that the identification and understanding of these distinctive elements can be enhanced in the practice of teaching Romanian as a non-maternal language" (Pál, 2017, 71). The non-maternal Romanian language is taught neither similarly to foreign languages, because the learner lives in the close environment of the Romanian language, nor similarly to the mother tongue, because it is considered a new language that is added to and related to the mother tongue. The acquisition of a language also means the assimilation of a culture, therefore language learning „is done in relation to and in correlation with the linguistic and cultural patterns of the mother tongue" (Tódor, 2017, 34).

National assessment, 2022, and the project regarding national minority pupils
It is well known that Hungarian-speaking pupils do not have adequate knowledge regarding the Romanian language. It is a serious disadvantage for pupils living in areas with a majority of Hungarian population, such as Miercurea Ciuc and its surroundings, that they hear the official state language only during the Romanian language lessons at the school (Márk & Boris, 2021).

There is still some progress. At least in 2022 there were much better results in the national assessment and the baccalaureate exam compared to previous years in Covasna and Harghita counties, counties with a predominantly Hungarian population (Kiss, 2022). In Covasna county, for example, 72.55% of high school graduates passed the baccalaureate exam, compared to 65.16% in 2021 (Botor, 2022).
A program has been launched for minority students which makes it possible to teach Romanian as a foreign language. This unusual initiative involves the Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj, The House of Teachers from Harghita County and the Hungarian National Center for Further Training from Oradea. (Borsi, 2021).

The aim of this program is to train 6,190 teachers in order to create various methodological studies and skill developing entertainment apps. The program will be tested with 370 students. Among the teachers there are 50 teachers who teach in Romanian classes, but whose pupils include members of the Hungarian minority. Their duty is to observe these pupils and adapt the educational form to their needs. The most important thing is that pupils who belong to national minorities can learn Romanian as effectively as possible. This is why it is recommended that the Romanian language should be taught to minorities with the use of methods specific to foreign language teaching.

The literature distinguishes two situations of language teaching and learning. *Exolingual communication (*CEX) takes place in situations where one of the speakers is a non-native speaker or the speakers are at different levels of language proficiency. If all speakers have the same language proficiency, we talk about *endolingual communication* (CEN). In a CEX situation, the native speaker is superior to the rest of the speakers, he does not understand the situation of the others, and is overly demanding and critical of their mistakes (Platon, 2021).

Communication competencies

The major goal of studying the Romanian language is the development of communication competences. In cognitive psychology, Noam Chomsky defines competence as a set of cognitive mechanisms involved in the intuitive grammar knowledge of the mother tongue, with the aim of producing linguistic performance. This approach, however, does not include those social situations that lead to a variety of manifestations regarding the speech of an individual. This is why the term *communicative competence* has been introduced into the academic discourse. This is a much broader term, which takes into account not only grammatical and pragmatic aspects, but also time and space, the participants-speakers, the relations between them, their role in communication, sociocultural norms, etc. Thus, an initially linguistic theory has been broadened into a theory of communication and culture (Platon, 2021).

The theoretical background of the communicative-functional model comprises: a. the issues of the communication situation; b. the six functions of language: referential, through which reality is described, expressive, through which emotional states are expressed, conative, through which the receiver is influenced to react in a certain way, poetic or artistic, phatic or relational, metalinguistic, through which the meaning of words and the correct use of grammatical rules are

clarified (the variant proposed by Jakobson), and c. the concept of communicative competence (Pamfil, 2016, 50-51, 53).

Communicative approach

The communicative approach differs from other approaches by the differentiated instruction realized in the teaching-learning process, because it takes into account both the cognitive needs of each student, as well as the motivational, attitudinal and emotional factors. These factors are present and manifest themselves differently in each communicative situation. This approach is oriented towards the formation of the ability to understand, convey and create new meanings in the interaction with others (Littlewood, 2011, 541., cited by Grădinari & Petriciuc, 2019, 29).

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

The most important document elaborated by the Language Policy Department of the Council of Europe is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages – Learning, Teaching, Assessment. It reflects an overall vision of language use and language teaching. The authors of the document have proposed a set of common standards for the implementation of EU Member States' language policies and a new code of communication between those involved in teaching/learning/assessing a language other than their mother tongue. Today, those who teach, learn or assess a foreign language, use the new language proficiency proposed in the CEFR: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, because they represent a code that describes in detail the performance of the student at different stages of language learning.

      We will take some concepts from the Common European Framework of Reference in order to follow how competences are defined here.

    a. „Competences are the sum of knowledge, skills and characteristics that allow a person to perform actions."

    b. „General competences are those not specific to language, but which are called upon for actions of all kinds, including language activities."

    c. „Communicative language competences are those which empower a person to act using specifically linguistic means" (*Cadrul european comun de referinţă pentru limbi*, 2003, 15.).

Placing the vocabulary by levels

Most of the experiments described in detail in this paper (see Chapters VI., VII., VIII.) were aimed at vocabulary development and sentence building skills. These two aspects were pursued through the use of the board game. Therefore, when using the board game, it was necessary to select the appropriate words and to divide them differentially both in the case of the experiments carried out in our class and in schools from different counties of the country.

Our research was based on the division of the Romanian vocabulary into levels realized by Elena Platon and collaborators. The aforementioned specialists used Romanian as a foreign/non-maternal language textbooks, as well as „the minimal vocabulary of Romanian, but at least as important were the teaching experience of RLS-RLNM and, of course, intuition. This, in turn, was mainly guided by criteria such as the frequency, usefulness, productivity or derivational power of a word, according to which it was placed higher or lower on the four-level scale." (Platon et al, 2013, 8.) In the experimental classes, we used words located at the A1 and A2 levels, B1 sometimes. We also designed and made cards on which there were words necessary for the game, according to the mentioned levels, and we applied them differentially, on two groups of students from our class: less advanced and good. The teachers who participated in the experiment, did the same.

Foreign language teaching methods

The thesis describes several language learning methods such as:

The Audio-Lingual Method (Galina, 2015, 203); (Bárdos, 2019);

The Audio-Visual Method (Surugiu, 2017, 167); (Bárdos, 2019);

The way of silence (Burlaciuc, 2013); (Meggyesné Hosszu, 2013); (Nagy, 2010);

Suggestopedia (Weitz, 2021); (Burlaciuc, 2013); (Meggyesné Hosszu, 2013);

Community language learning (Burlaciuc, 2013); (Meggyesné Hosszu, 2013);

The Cognitive Learning Method (Bárdos, 2019);

The Total Physical Response Method (Asher, 2009 cited by Meggyesné, 2013); (Burlaciuc, 2013); (Nagy, 2010);

The Direct Method (Oprescu, 2008); (László, 2014); (Ionescu, 2008);

The Contrastive Method (Budai cited by Vígh Szabó, 2015, 314); (Andric, 2012); (Csumita, 2014); (Pál, 2017, 53).

In addition to the methods presented above, the thesis pays particular attention to the presentation of two methods that can be used effectively during Romanian language lessons.

One of the methods particularly emphasized in the thesis is the use of the board game in the Romanian language lesson. The author of the thesis has created a board game for teaching Romanian (which can also be used for learning other languages) which is primarily useful for developing vocabulary and sentence building skills. The board game is called Relax 2 and is recommended from the second part of the second grade until the end of the fourth grade, i.e. at the end of the basic acquisition cycle, when children already know how to read in Romanian. The second method is the Gopo Method, recommended primarily for preparatory and first grade.

The importance of freedom of expression for children

Children are capable of remaining silent for a long time, of being passive, of carrying the burdens present in their daily lives on their own. They may bring these problems from the family or they may arise at school. Among the stages of psychosocial development, school age is the stage in which the child strives, achieves certain goals, experiences success or even failure, which leads to feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem (Urbán, 2007).

This is especially characteristic of lower ability students who are always disadvantaged. Because they lack adequate self-esteem, they withdraw, daydream, are indifferent, have school phobia, or may even fall into depression (Gordon, 2001).

Unfortunately, most children don't dare to express their opinion publicly about their school lessons, and they don't even talk about their problems with their classmates. „They don't like to talk about problems, even though they weigh on them like a heavy burden. The specialist pedagogue/teacher only sees that the pupil is not paying attention, seeks to relax during the lesson, tries to draw the attention towards himself, struggles with behavioural disorders and learning difficulties." (Urbán, 2007) In the case of such children, this is no different in Romanian language lessons. If a child does not understand the language, he does not dare to speak, becomes frustrated and gives up the fight. He does not even try to understand what is going on around him. It is not easy for teachers either, as they often have to invest extra energy in order to motivate a child to learn, or to help the pupil overcome his prejudices towards learning Romanian. The 4 hours of Romanian language lessons per week spent at school are not enough. According to parents, even pupils who learn in the best schools need activities related to the

language and Romanian language lessons outside the school walls. What's more, for some children, it can take up to a year to overcome prejudices about learning Romanian. These children need to attend private lessons for at least two or three years in order for their knowledge of Romanian to begin to develop (Pap, 2020). These prejudices stem largely from experiences of failure that lead to anxiety.

Anxiety

Research conducted in Australia considered the extent to which and how anxiety influences the performance of students who speak and learn English as a second language in the class and outside of it. Anxiety can be a personality trait, a state or a situational anxiety. The anxiety that occurs when learning a language is a situational anxiety. Anxiety reactions can be categorized into emotionality or anxiety reactions. Emotionality refers to physiological reactions such as blushing, a racing heartbeat and behavioural reactions such as stuttering and fidgeting. Anxiety refers to cognitive reactions such as self-deprecating thoughts or thoughts that are not relevant for the task. Anxiety is considered the more debilitating of the two because it takes up cognitive capacity that would otherwise be devoted to the task at hand, in our case speaking in a foreign language (Woodrow, 2006). „Anxious children usually focus excessively on negative outcomes, show changes in body functioning, and avoid situations that appear threatening." (CNSMLA article: Anxietatea la copii și adolescenți, 2022)

Anxiety may appear due to lack of practice, resulting in a type of skill-deficit anxiety. Another type of anxiety is information retrieval anxiety, which means that anxiety prevents the recall of the learned material. Anxiety is a problem in language learning and has a debilitating effect on speaking for some students, so it is important for the teacher to be sensitive to this when interacting in the classroom and to offer help to minimize anxiety when using the second language (Woodrow, 2006).

Motivation as a factor in the language learning process

Motivation can be defined as enthusiasm, interest, commitment that makes someone do something. In order to motivate children, we need to know their characteristics. Most children do not have a specific goal towards which they would orient their learning; many children like to accomplish goals that are at a level they are capable of reaching, because they want to be sure

that their efforts are not in vain; children like to work with their hands, body and mind. If this need of theirs is not satisfied, then they tend to make noise and leave their seats; they like to listen to songs and are good at imitating sounds and facial expressions; children are not good at analysing linguistic rules, they do not understand abstract concepts and dislike boring, low activity classes when they just have to listen to the teacher throughout the class (Yulistianti, 2016). But if pupils really want to learn something, then, just like adults, they will learn that thing (Neill, 2005).

Justification of the research problem, proposing the use of board games and the Gopo Method as possible methods for teaching Romanian to minorities

Children whose mother tongue is Hungarian are disadvantaged in many ways because they do not know Romanian well enough. According to a research carried out in 2017, parents and teachers see the reason for failure in the fact that pupils do not have the opportunity to practise Romanian. Most teachers believe that there is a need for new ways of teaching the language and motivating pupils (Molnár, 2018).

If we look carefully at the law from 2011 and the order from 2017, we can see that one of the disciplines (Romanian language and literature) has two curricula: one for native speakers and one for non-native speakers. The new textbooks are based on these curricula. Innovation in teaching means many new opportunities as well as many challenges, so the most important question is how Hungarian schools in Romania can make use of these new possibilities.

Looking at some of the main components of the paradigm shift, we can state the following:

- the emphasis is less on transferring lexical knowledge and more on harmonizing content with specific competencies;
- integrated practice of oral and written comprehension and text production skills is encouraged;
- the development of intercultural competences;
- vocabulary enrichment follows a thematic structure, with topics linked to real-life situations;
- the choice of literary and non-literary texts related to the topic takes account of pupils' age and linguistic peculiarities;

- the teaching process is guided by a functional approach to meta-linguistic knowledge, thus the practical use of language knowledge is supported rather than a descriptive grammar approach;
- it takes into account children's experience gained by using their mother tongue.

The mentioned guidelines not only illustrate the elements of the paradigm shift, but also point to aspects that will become expectations in the future, both with regard to the use of textbooks and the organization of the dialogue conducted in the classroom (Tódor, 2018).

From the point of view of the Hungarian minority, the reform of Romanian language teaching has become particularly important in terms of the changes that appear in the discipline: the essence of this is to teach Romanian more effectively to those whose mother tongue is not Romanian, developing the communication skills necessary for everyday life. Since the end of the 1990s, it has become increasingly clear that young Hungarians find it more and more difficult to cope with the daily use of Romanian. Another problem is the deterioration of the school performance due to very poor results of the Romanian exams. Experts have found that textbooks adapted to the reform are indeed effective. The challenge remains the efficiency and correctness of the use of Romanian in out-of-school situations and in everyday life. School itself is not sufficient for Romanian language learning, as it would be at least equally important for children to be in constant contact with Romanian speakers outside of school – during sport activities, on playgrounds, at various activities outside of school (Magyari, 2020).

An example would be a Romanian language camp, organized during the holidays for Hungarian children, where we can run different activities attractive for them. One of these activities could be board games used with the aim of improving their knowledge of Romanian, which can later be included in the Romanian language lessons, with the hope that this will become a possible method for teaching Romanian to minorities. In addition, the Gopo Method has proved to be effective in Romanian language classes in the preparatory and first classes, i.e. when children cannot yet read.

Board games in language teaching

In our rapidly changing world, the roughly fifteen thousand hours that students spend in schools must be shaped by teachers so that future adults succeed in life and achieve their goals (Rogers, cited by Klein 2013). We need to bring something to the teaching-learning process that

can capture children's attention in a world of technology, something that will spark their interest in learning.

The ability to learn effectively and independently is developed during board games. If a student wants to win or perform, he has to learn constantly (Lencse, 2016). Board games develop key competences and play a major role in developing communication in the mother tongue, in text comprehension, in reading comprehension, in word comprehension, synonyms, etc. Recommended games for this purpose are Citadella, Tabu and Mizeria. If we want to teach pupils new words in a foreign language, Guess Who is the right game. Board games develop social skills, entrepreneurial skills, but at the same time stimulate artistic awareness and effective, independent learning (Fejes & et al, 2016). The child also learns to interpret the meta-communication signals and becomes able to control his own communication. In this way, the learner can consciously minimize his own meta-communicative cues in order to get along better with his peers (Jesztl & Lencse, 2016). Board games are also effective in learning complex grammatical structures. A possible strategy for board games consists of four steps: correcting mistakes, formulating questions, formulating answers and composing sentences. The benefits of using board games identified by researchers are: it eliminates the fear of grammar, helps to develop self-confidence, and allows students to use new words and structures without being aware of it (Paris & Yussof, 2013).

The use of board games also proves to be useful in the use of a foreign language in communication. When the aim is to learn new words and simple phrases, Guess Who or Dobble can be helpful for the teacher (Lencse, 2016).

The Gopo Method

This method for Romanian language teaching was developed by Andrea Gergely, a language teacher from Cluj. According to her, the method was named after Ion Popescu's little Gopo man. She fondly remembers this figure from her childhood and wanted the name of the method to be linked to the Romanian culture (Zsigmond, 2015).

So the gray figure chosen by the author is called Gopo, he has no ears and knows no Hungarian. The fact that he doesn't have ears is a deliberate element chosen for a purpose. Gopo doesn't know Hungarian, he only knows Romanian, but he doesn't always hear it either.

Therefore, the children repeat new words or phrases over and over again, because they have to repeat them until Gopo gets to hear them too.

Gopo is much loved by the children because he participates in their games, asks them questions, answers them. Sometimes he pretends not to hear what is being said to him, causing the children to repeat a word several times (Zsigmond, 2015).

The essence of the method is to provide an environment in which pupils can connect the new information to the given context and apply what they learn immediately to the given situation. If the child wants to say something to Gopo and doesn't know how to say it, the teacher whispers, so the pupil asks aloud what he originally wanted to ask from the puppet. Sometimes the teacher has to guide the pupils on what to ask Gopo. The children will be encouraged to pay attention to the puppet and their peers, because they also learned their mother tongue by always paying attention to others (*Másképpen románul, Gopóval*, 2014).

The teacher's task is to provide a model in an anxiety-free atmosphere, to provide a sense of success, to model the child's behaviour. All this can be achieved through playing and by simulating certain situations (*Alternatív román nyelvoktatás*, 2015).

CHAPTER 2. INTERVIEW – TEACHER'S OPINION ABOUT THE ROMANIAN LESSONS[1]

The aim of the research was to find out the teachers' opinions/suggestions regarding the use of board games/other effective methods in the Romanian language lesson, their attitude towards Romanian language and their advice for parents.

Research questions

The research sought answers to the following questions:

How do the teachers who teach in Hungarian classes live/experience the Romanian lessons?

How much time do they spend preparing Romanian lessons?

How motivated do they think children are to learn Romanian?

To what extent are parents partners in motivating their children?

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[1] Juhasz, A. (2022). Hungarian classes teachers' opinion about the romanian lessons given at the school (Magyar nyelvű elemi osztályokat tanító pedagógusok nézetei az iskolában zajló románórákról). *PedActa, 12*(2).

Why do Hungarian-speaking pupils have difficulties in learning Romanian?

What methods do teachers use in Romanian lessons?

What suggestions do they have for parents?

Research tools

We used the oral questioning method. This took the form of a structured interview in which teachers candidly expressed their opinions about their Romanian language lessons. They did this in person, on Zoom, Messenger or over the phone. The content of the interview was recorded.

Participants

The research involved 52 teachers who teach Hungarian primary classes in different counties of Romania.

Conclusions

Most teachers usually use traditional methods supplemented with alternative methods in Romanian language lessons at school. They try to make Romanian language lessons attractive for students through didactic games, role-play/dramatic games, teamwork, Romanian songs, online exercises, learning rhymes/poems, interactive games, situational games, puppets, etc. More than half of the teachers also use board games in their Romanian lessons. The most popular games are some dice games, Activity, „Don't get mad, Brother!", Memory, Dobble and Brain Box. Other games that are favourite for teachers are Hedbanz and Tick Tack Bumm. According to them, board games increase motivation, help playful learning, develop communication skills and make students become more courageous about class work. As disadvantages they mentioned that board games are time-consuming and involve a lot of noise. More than half of the teachers like Romanian language lessons and find teaching Romanian challenging. Some find Romanian lessons tiring or feel that they are a struggle with time. More than half of the teachers prepare thoroughly for Romanian lessons, devoting an hour or more to preparation. However, the majority of teachers (71.15%) admitted that they had come away from their Romanian lessons more than once with a feeling of failure. The remaining part claims that they try not to interpret the lack of success as failure, and that it was more likely that not everything went well and that they felt worried after the Romanian lessons. On the other hand, the majority of teachers claim that pupils are not motivated to learn Romanian or, at best, they are externally motivated.

According to the teachers, the difficulty is caused by the fact that there is not a right environment for practising Romanian and the attitude of the parents is not suitable to motivate pupils to learn Romanian. There are children who do not dare to speak in Romanian because they are afraid of embarrassing themselves. Teachers try to help these children with more praise/encouragement, pair work, games, repeating what has been said and helpful questions.

Only 46.15% of teachers claim that there is time left for practising the living language at school in addition to the material prescribed in the curriculum. According to the other teachers, there is little or no time left at school to practise the living language, only in the afternoons or through an optional discipline. Most teachers claim that 30% of the children could get ahead in a Romanian environment. Teachers recommend parents to speak Romanian at home, to organize Romanian language days when nobody speaks Hungarian at home, to find Romanian-speaking friends for their children, to watch Romanian fairy tales/cartoons, to watch Romanian TV shows, to listen to Romanian radio shows, to take their children to a Romanian environment, to learn Romanian songs and poems, to label objects in Romanian at home. What is even more important is that some parents should change their attitude towards Romanian (Juhász, 2022).

CHAPTER 3. THE HUNGARIAN PUPILS' (FROM ROMANIA) OPINION AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS ROMANIAN LANGUAGE LEARNING

The aim of the research was to find out children's attitudes towards learning Romanian and their motivation.

Research questions

The research seeks answers to the following questions:

What is the pupils' opinion about their own knowledge regarding Romanian language?

What is the students' motivation for learning Romanian?

How do pupils feel about the Romanian language and Romanian lessons?

How actively do pupils participate in Romanian language lessons?

What is the extent of the pupils anxiety about Romanian language?

Research tools

The research instrument was a questionnaire, which contains 5 demographic questions, 5 statements measured on a 5-level Likert scale from 1 (*disagree*) to 5 (*agree*) and 25 statements measured on a 4-level Likert scale from 1 (*disagree*) to 4 (*agree*). The questionnaire is included in Annex 4.

The questionnaire was completed both online and on paper.

Participants

545 primary school students (402 completed the questionnaire online and 143 in printed format) from 12 different counties in Romania participated in the survey. Out of these, 248 (45.50%) were 3rd grade pupils and 297 (54.49%) 4th grade pupils.

Results/Conclusions

We discuss the findings based on the research questions.

Comparing the responses of pupils who speak Romanian at home with one or both parents, we discover that students who speak Romanian at home (M = 3.30, SD = 0.87) consider their communication skills in Romanian significantly better than those who do not speak Romanian at home at all (M = 3.03, SD = 0.88), W = 23265.50, p = .002.

Comparing the average of the answers of pupils who speak Romanian at home with the answers of those who do not – statements with statistically significant differences

Statement	I don't talk Romanian at home		I talk Romanian at home		W	P
	Average	Standard deviation	Average	Standard deviation		
I speak Romanian well.	2.50	1.21	2.94	1.32	22755.50	<.001
I can say correct sentences in Romanian.	2.57	1.16	3.04	1.25	22038.00	<.001
I think I speak acceptably.	2.62	1.33	3.21	1.39	21473.00	<.001
I like the Romanian language.	2.48	1.16	2.84	1.16	23218.00	.001
I don't feel comfortable	2.23	1.15	1.94	1.06	31968	.012

when I have to talk in Romanian.						
I usually feel good at the Romanian lessons.	2.79	1.15	3.02	1.09	25063.50	.042
I often feel that learning the Romanian language is a burden for me.	2.22	1.14	1.95	1.14	32184.50	.008
I learn the Romanian language because, according to my teacher, it is an important discipline.	2.83	1.13	3.07	1.07	24696.50	.023
I don't like the Romanian lessons.	2.11	1.19	1.81	1.06	31993.50	.010
I would like to learn something else instead of Romanian.	2.46	1.28	2.17	1.15	31893.00	.014
I like Romanian language because the teacher is enthusiastic during the Romanian lessons.	2.34	1.10	2.63	1.16	24244.00	.012
I learn easily new words in Romanian.	2.58	1.13	2.96	1.15	22819.50	<.001

Pupils' opinion about their own Romanian language proficiency

Only a quarter of the pupils think that they speak Romanian well and build correct sentences.

Urban students have significantly higher self-perceived language proficiency than rural students. At the same time, pupils who speak Romanian at home with at least one parent consider that they know Romanian better than those who do not speak Romanian at home.

The level of self-perceived language proficiency is positively correlated with internal motivation to study Romanian, positive feelings towards Romanian and Romanian language lessons and active participation in Romanian language lessons, and negatively correlated with anxiety towards Romanian language lessons.

Pupils' motivation for studying the Romanian language

Pupils have mixed motivation for studying Romanian, because both internal and external motivation is present among the most agreed statements. However, internal motivation is significantly stronger than external motivation.

The internal motivation of the pupils who speak Romanian at home too is significantly stronger than in the case of those who do not speak Romanian at home. Pupils in grade 3 have a significantly higher external motivation than pupils in grade 4. At the same time, rural pupils have a significantly higher external motivation for learning Romanian than urban pupils.

Internal motivation is positively correlated with external motivation, positive feelings towards Romanian language and Romanian language lessons and active participation in the lessons, and negatively correlated with anxiety towards Romanian language lessons. External motivation is positively correlated with positive feelings towards the Romanian language lesson. There is also a weak positive correlation of external motivation with positive feelings towards Romanian language lessons and with anxiety towards Romanian language lessons.

Pupils' feelings about the Romanian language and the Romanian lessons

Around half of the pupils claim that they like Romanian and enjoy Romanian language lessons. Students have significantly more positive feelings towards Romanian than towards Romanian lessons.

Urban pupils have significantly more positive feelings towards Romanian than rural pupils. Students who also speak Romanian at home like Romanian and Romanian language lessons significantly more than those who do not speak Romanian at home.

Positive feelings towards Romanian language are strongly positively correlated with self-perceived Romanian language proficiency and internal motivation, weakly positively correlated with external motivation and strongly negatively correlated with anxiety about Romanian language lessons.

Active participation of the pupils in the Romanian lessons

Respondents participate quite actively in lessons, only a quarter say they do not raise their hands during the Romanian language lessons, a third give up easily when they encounter difficulties, and two thirds would agree to resolve extra exercises during the lesson.

In terms of active participation in Romanian language lessons, there are no significant differences between 3rd and 4th grade, urban and rural pupils or between pupils who speak Romanian at home and those who do not.

Active participation in lessons is strongly positively correlated with self-perceived Romanian language proficiency, internal motivation, positive feelings towards Romanian language and Romanian language learning, and strongly negatively correlated with anxiety towards Romanian language lessons.

Pupils' anxiety about Romanian language lessons

Around half of the respondents feel anxious when they have to write Romanian language tests, but only a quarter feel stressed when they have to speak in Romanian language lessons.

In terms of pupils' anxiety about Romanian language lessons, between 3rd and 4th grade, there are no significant differences between urban and rural pupils, nor between pupils who also speak Romanian at home and those who do not.

Pupils' anxiety towards Romanian language lessons is strongly negatively correlated with self-perceived Romanian language proficiency, internal motivation, active participation in the lesson, positive feelings towards Romanian language and Romanian language study, and weakly positively correlated with internal motivation.

CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH ON THE CURRENT SITUATION OF THE USE OF BOARD GAMES BY PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS[2]

The aim of the research was to assess teachers' attitudes towards the use of board games at school and in their private lives.

Research questions

This research sought answers to the following questions:

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[2] Juhasz, A. (2020). Board-games in teaching Romanian language (Társasjátékok alkalmazása a román nyelv tanításában). *PedActa, 10*(1).

Do primary school teachers play board games?

What are the teachers' favourite board games?

What kind of board games do teachers use when teaching?

For what disciplines do teachers use board games?

How much time do teachers dedicate for playing board games in a lesson?

For what purpose do teachers use board game?

What advantages and disadvantages have they experienced?

Do primary school teachers usually use board games in their Romanian language lessons?

How often do they use board games in the Romanian language lesson and at what stage of the lesson?

How much time do teachers dedicate for playing board games in a Romanian lesson?

For what purpose do teachers use board game in the Romanian lessons?

What board games do they use in the Romanian lesson and which are their favourites?

What advantages and disadvantages do they experience when playing board games in Romanian language lessons?

Research tools

We conducted an online questionnaire, taking into account some previous studies (Zsoldos–Marchis, Juhász, 2020; Jesztl&Lencse 2018) related to teachers' attitudes or opinions about board game-based learning. The questionnaire contains 34 questions, with subjective and objective items: 7 demographic questions and 26 questions related to the research topic. Participants ticked their response to 45 statements, from 1 to 5, on a Likert scale, thus answering four objective questions.

Participants

The participants are 159 teachers who teach in 12 different counties in Romania, in Hungarian classes: 66.6% of them teach in rural areas, 33.4% in urban areas. Most of the participants (89.9%) teach in traditional schools, but some of the respondents teach in schools representing alternative tendencies, such as denominational schools, sports schools or art schools. 15% of the participants teach in preparatory classes, 16.9% in class 1, 16.3% in class 2, 13.2% in class 3, 16.3% in class 4, and 22% of the participants teach in mixed classes, usually in rural schools where there are not enough children to have independent classes. More than half of the participants (54%) have a lot of teaching experience, more than 20 years, and a proportion

(18.2%) of them have between 16 and 20 years of experience (Figure 6). They are qualified teachers, 83% of them have a Bachelor's Degree. Two thirds of the teachers (66%) have obtained Grade 1, the highest grade for teachers, 17.6% Grade 2, 12.5% the final degree and 3.7% are beginner teachers who have not yet taken an exam.

Conclusions

According to our research, most teachers enjoy board games. The most popular board games in the teachers' circles are the following: *Activity, Rummy, Catan, Brain Box, Don't get mad, brother!, Pseudonyms, Monopoly, Gazdálkodj okosan!, Dobble, Dixit, Tabu*. We were interested in whether teachers use in class the same games they play at home. The results show that Activity comes first in both cases. This game is the teachers' favourite game in their personal life and the one they use most often in class. The research tried to find out the advantages and disadvantages of using board games in the educational process by the teachers participating in this research. The most frequently expressed advantages are that board games develop team spirit, self-control, logical thinking and at the same time increase motivation.

The disadvantages most often mentioned are that the use of board games is time-consuming, creates classroom management problems and could create frustration or a sense of failure. 18.7% of participants stated that there were no disadvantages to integrating them into the educational process. Teachers use board games in teaching Hungarian language, for mathematics, for science, 54.7% for Romanian language and for moral education.

The time allocated to these games during a lesson is between 10 and 15 minutes (72.3%), but a significant percentage of teachers (23.8%) allocate 16-30 minutes for these games.

More than half of the teachers consider the use of board games in Romanian language lessons to be effective. Many teachers claim that board games are appropriate in helping pupils overcome their prejudices about Romanian. Most teachers claim that board games make learning Romanian fun and an engaging experience (Juhász, 2020).

CHAPTER 5. DESIGN OF A COMPLEX BOARD GAME FOR TEACHING ROMANIAN AND PILOT TESTING OF THE GAME[3]

Pilot testing of the board game Relax 1

The aim of the research

The purpose of the research is to test the game with children from different classes and different levels, as well as to model/change the game based on the observations and suggestions of the teacher-researcher, the Romanian language teacher who participated in the game testing and the children.

Participants

The participants were a Romanian language teacher and 12 pupils: 1 pupil in the preparatory class, 3 pupils in 1st grade, 4 pupils in 3rd grade and 4 pupils in 4th grade. These are children whose mother tongue is Hungarian and whose parents are of Hungarian nationality, so they communicate at home only in Hungarian. They do not have any neighbours or playmates in their immediate environment who would speak Romanian, so they encounter Romanian only at school.

Organizing the testing of the game

The testing took place between July 22 and September 8, 2020, in Tășnad (Satu Mare County). Children participated 9 times and played in teams of 4 persons. They played for 4 hours each time, in total 36 hours.

Data collection

The first 3 days they played Relax 1, which meant 4-5 games per day. Each run of the game lasted 40-50 minutes, so they played Relax 1 for 16-20 hours in total. The children had great fun and were free to express their opinions about the game. The researcher measured playing time and took notes when he noticed any problems. The children were interviewed using a semi-structured interview. The researcher was interested in the following: how much the children enjoyed the game, whether they understood the rules, whether they found the game sufficiently

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[3] Juhasz, A. (2021). Designing a board-game for teaching Romanian language to Hungarian primary school pupils (A román nyelv oktatását elősegítő társasjáték tervezése elemi osztályban tanuló magyar gyerekek számára). *PedActa, 11*(1).

effective, what they thought should be changed and whether they would like to learn Romanian at school with the use of the game.

Results

Children's opinion about the Relax 1 game

When asked if they liked the game, all the children said yes. When asked if the rules of the game were difficult, only one child said that it was a bit difficult at first, the other pupils said that the rules were not complicated. When asked whether they understood the rules, all children answered yes. When asked what they liked about the game, the answers were different. Each child liked spinning the wheel of fortune. Two children said that they liked most that they had to solve mathematical problems in Romanian. They claimed that they had never solved mathematical problems in Romanian. Every child mentioned that they had a good time and that they liked that they could get points. Pantomime was also mentioned by all the children, especially when they had the opportunity to use accessories that were related to the topic. They also mentioned drawing: some enjoyed drawing on the sidewalk, others on a portable drawing board, and some in the air. One of the children preferred to ask for help from someone when he had to draw, so he shared the points he got with that child. When it came to singing, the children preferred to sing in pairs or groups. There were only 2 children who liked to sing alone.

Each child enjoyed running around the table or presenting a gymnastic exercise they named in Romanian. To my surprise, most of the children also said that „it is so good that we can learn so many words in Romanian". The older children were happy that they managed to build sentences, even if they didn't always manage without help. A little girl in the preparatory class discovered during the game that her mother is a „farmacistă" (pharmacist).

When I asked the children what they would change about the game, three children came up with a suggestion, the others said it was fine the way it was. One little boy and two little girls suggested using the dice not just at the beginning, but throughout the entire game, so that they could move forward with bigger steps. They think that the game takes too long if we keep going step by step. When the children were asked if the game was effective enough, all three children responded that using the dice would make it super-effective.

They didn't give me an unequivocal answer when I asked them if they were disappointed when they didn't get to the finish line first. Most of them said that every time, anyway, another person gets to the finish line first and their turn will come too.

When I asked the students if they would like to play board games in their Romanian language lessons, all of them, without exception, answered affirmatively. Most of them said: „it is very good to learn by playing". We also asked if they found the game useful. Everyone said yes, and one little boy said he didn't even think he could learn so many new words in one game.

The observations of the teacher-researcher

Instead of a competitive spirit, solidarity dominated between the children. They agreed among themselves that they would sing together, helped each other make up sentences and happily shared the points when they worked together on an exercise. The cards illustrating unfamiliar words piqued the children's interest. One of these was the word *bibilică* (guinea fowl). One little boy said that he didn't even want to pick up another card during the whole game, lest he forget this word. It was not a problem if one of the children reached the finish line last or got the fewest points, because in the next game he also had a chance to reach the finish line first. Spinning the wheel of chance was one of their favourite tasks, they enjoyed repeating it even after the game was over.

Learning a song before the game that is related to the subject of the game is well worth the time invested, because it gets the children to start the game happily. Pantomime entertains children, so we try to give them accessories according to the topic of the game. They cannot talk, but they have a basket, a hat, an apron, a whisk, etc. which helps them illustrate what they want to show. If we sometimes even take a photograph, which we look at during the breaks, it makes the atmosphere even more pleasant. I have noticed during the first two occasions that good mood is the most important thing. If we focus directly on the rules of the game, this can frighten the children. If children want to stop for a longer time at a relaxation point, such as drawing or pantomime, we should not interrupt their activity for lack of time, just in order to finish the game. If they remain with a good impression after a game, they look forward to the next opportunity to play.

Modifications

Since the children like it if the game is more effective, the author decided to change the rules of the game. The change consists of the following: the dice can be used throughout the whole game (initially we only used the dice at the beginning of the game to determine who starts the game, because the one who rolled the highest number started first) so that the game can progress more

quickly. But because of the length of the game, it remains as a free activity for summer camps, as the duration of Relax 1 is 50 minutes.

Second version of the game (Relax 2) based on the author's observations and the children's suggestions

Relax 2 was born from Relax 1. This version is similar to the first one, but is more in line with the expectations of the Romanian lessons in terms of content and duration. We called this game Relax 2, it lasts about 20 minutes. The difference in the content of this game is that, instead of physical exercises, the cards contain sayings and proverbs related to the subject of the game.

The children also played this game once a week for 6 weeks and in this game they did not want to change anything. They enjoyed the challenge of encountering a different topic each time and learning new words by playing (Juhász, 2021).

CHAPTER 6. EFFECTIVENESS OF BOARD GAMES FOR VOCABULARY ENRICHMENT.[4] PILOT STUDY

The aim of the research

The aim of the research is to evaluate the effectiveness of using the Relax 2 board game developed by the author in terms of vocabulary development and sentence formation skills. It will also evaluate the changes in children's motivation and attitude towards the Romanian language lesson.

Hypotheses

After using the board game:

1. The children will learn more new Romanian words;

2. The pupils will make up more correct sentences;

3. Children will be more motivated to learn Romanian;

4. More children will like the Romanian language.

Participants

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[4] Juhasz, A. (2022). Pilot study on the effectiveness of the „Relax 2" board-game in improving vocabulary and sentence formation sills in Romanian. *Acta Didactica Napocensia, 15*(1).

The participants were 4th grade students from the Tășnad Secondary School, a total of 21 children, 9 girls and 12 boys.

Research tools

14 topics were covered: 7 topics processed with traditional teaching methods and 7 topics processed with the Relax 2 board game. We used tests to assess the level of knowledge at the beginning and at the end of each lesson. The test included 12 Hungarian words that the children had to translate into Romanian and then make a sentence with one of the words they knew. This test was solved before and after each intervention. In this way, we clearly assessed how many words the child knew before the intervention and how many he was able to learn during the intervention, as well as how much his sentence-building skills developed during the intervention. The research was based on the division of the Romanian vocabulary into levels carried out by Elena Platon and collaborators. We also assembled the word cards necessary for the game according to the mentioned levels and applied them differentially, adapting them to the level of each student.

At the beginning and at the end of the research the children completed a motivation test in which pupils' attitudes towards the Romanian language lesson and their motivation for learning were assessed. In this way we could track the changes in pupils' motivation.

Results/Conclusions

In terms of vocabulary development, we can see that students learned on average a little more than 5 (5.17) words in the lessons held with traditional methods, while in the lessons held through board games they learned almost 7 (6.87) new words. The difference is almost 2 (1.7) words in favour of learning through the board game. In the case of making a sentence, we can observe that 23.12% of the children could not make a sentence on the given topic in the lessons taught with traditional methods, while after using the board game the percentage of children who could not make a sentence decreased to 21.76%. If we look at the number of correct sentences, we can see that 35.37% of the children made correct sentences after the lessons with traditional methods, while after using the board game, 56.46% of the children were able to make correct sentences. Examining the difference between spelling and grammatical mistakes made while making sentences, we can see that after using traditional methods, the average number of

incorrect sentences was 8.71 sentences, while after using board games, the average number of incorrect sentences decreased to 4.57 sentences.

Overall, by using board games, children learned almost with 2 words more than when using traditional methods, the average number of incorrect sentences decreased by almost half, and more than half (56.46%) of the children formed correct sentences. The results of the knowledge level tests validate these data and there is also a large difference between the results of the pre- and post-tests done on motivation. According to the results of the written motivation test before the experiment, 19.04% of the children confessed that they could not speak Romanian at all, while at the end of the experiment no child said that they could not speak Romanian at all. At the pre-assessment, 23.80% of the children stated that they think they can speak Romanian in an acceptable way, and after the experiment this percentage doubled (52.38%). Before the experiment, 19.04% of the children stated that they can speak Romanian well, and at the end of the experiment, the number of children who stated that they can speak Romanian well increased to 47.61%. Of course, this does not mean that they speak Romanian flawlessly, but they express themselves more courageously and cheerfully. If at the beginning of the experiment 23.80% of the children declared that they like Romanian, by the end of the experiment this percentage had increased to 61.90%. At the beginning of the intervention, 66.66% of the pupils stated that they do not speak in Romanian because they were afraid of being ridiculed, but by the end of the intervention this number had dropped to 19.04%. The experiment showed that the use of board games enriches children's Romanian vocabulary, helps to develop sentence building skills and eliminates grammatical and spelling mistakes. The use of board games brings about a positive change in children's attitudes towards Romanian, makes them more courageous in communication and more motivated to learn Romanian (Juhász, 2022).

CHAPTER 7. EXPERIMENTAL RESEARCH ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE BOARD GAME IN ROMANIAN LANGUAGE TEACHING[5]

Description of the research

The research took place between October 11, 2021 and May 20, 2022 among Hungarian 3rd grade students and their teachers from different counties of the country (Satu Mare, Sălaj, Cluj, Covasna, Harghita).

The aim of the research

The aim of the research is to evaluate the effectiveness of the use of the board game developed by the author in terms of vocabulary development and sentence building skills. It also evaluates the changes of the children's motivation and attitude towards the Romanian language lesson.

Hypotheses

Pupils will evolve during the lessons hold with the use of the board game:

1. They will learn more new Romanian words;

2. They will build more sentences in Romanian;

3. They will become more active in their Romanian lessons, even those who before were not active at all;

4. They will become motivated to learn Romanian;

5. Their level of Romanian knowledge will increase.

Research tools

The Relax 2 board game

The board game Relax 2 is invented for pupils whose mother tongue is Hungarian (or another minority language). It can be used for any topic present in primary grades. It is recommended for grades 2 (starting from the second semester, when pupils can read in Romanian), 3 and 4. The cards are changed according to the topic. It can be used at different levels and the difference in level determines the content of the cards on which the words/pictures appear.

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[5] Juhasz, A. (22–24 noiembrie 2023). *The effectiveness of the use of board games in Romanian lessons among children from Hungarian elementary classes.* Doctoral Students' Conference: Tradition, Development & Innovation in Didactics – Early Career Researchers Conference (TDID – ERC).

Observation diary

The teachers who took part in this experiment noted the students' behaviour, their attitude towards the Romanian language and their activity during each lesson.

Evaluation tests

In order to measure the students' level of Romanian language proficiency, assessment tests were administered both before and after the experiment. In this way it was possible to track how many new words the pupils learned in one Romanian language lesson.

Motivation test

A motivation questionnaire was administered both before and after the experiment. In this way we tracked the changes of the pupils' motivation.

The research was based on the division of Romanian vocabulary into levels carried out by Elena Platon and collaborators (Platon et al, 2013). 10 topics were covered. Each topic was associated with 12 words that the children had to learn. The topics were the following: *At the school, Seasons, In free time, Crafts, The city, Holidays, My friend, On vacation, Let's set the table, Let's circulate correctly!*.

The topics were taught to 5 classes of 3rd grade with traditional methods and to 5 classes of 3rd grade with the use of the board game. A motivation/attitude questionnaire was applied both at the beginning of the intervention and after the intervention. In this way we tracked the changes of the students' motivation.

Participants

The participants were 212 third grade pupils and 10 teachers. The research took place in Hungarian classes from different counties of the country.

Conclusions

With the use of the traditional methods, according to the research results, students were able to learn 2.27 new words overall, while using the board game, they learned 5.30 words during each Romanian language lesson. The difference is 3 words.

In terms of developing sentence building skills, students generally included 1 (0.94) word in a sentence during lessons held with traditional methods, but with the use of the board game

they were able to include almost 4 (3.67) words in more sentences. That is with almost 3 (2.73) more words with the use of the board game than when using traditional methods.

Comparing the pre-test results with the post-test results regarding the pupils' attitude towards Romanian language, we can see that, when using traditional methods, for 16 out of 25 statements, there is a slight improvement, while for 9 statements, the situation worsened after the intervention in terms of children's attitude towards Romanian language lesson.

However, after using the board game, the children's attitude towards Romanian lessons changed in a positive direction. Out of the 25 statements, the results for 22 statements showed improvements and for 3 statements a slight regression. A particularly good result can be observed in the case of the 2nd statement, where 20.66% more students affirmed in the post-test that they like Romanian, and in the case of the 17th statement, 33.78% fewer pupils affirmed in the post-test that they dislike Romanian. The post-intervention result is remarkably good also for statement 23, where 35.52% more students stated that they easily learn new Romanian words. As for statement 24, with 29.37% more students declared after the intervention that they are not afraid of written tests in Romanian.

Comparing the results after using the two methods, we can observe that in 4 out of 5 statements the results of the lessons hold with the board game are 20-30% better than in the case of the lessons hold with traditional methods, in terms of children's opinion about their own knowledge of Romanian.

According to teachers' observations, there is a significant difference between the results of the two methods in terms of the development of the children. In lessons where board games were used, motivation increased in case of more pupils than in lessons where traditional methods were used. Achievement levels also increased significantly in case of more pupils in lessons where board games were used than in lessons where traditional methods were used (Juhász, 2023).

CHAPTER 8. PILOT STUDY ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE GOPO METHOD FOR VOCABULARY ENRICHMENT IN THE PREPARATORY CLASS[6]

The aim of the research

The aim of the research is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Gopo Method, as well as to develop vocabulary and skills in creating sentences of 2-3 words, but also to observe the evolution of motivation and attitude of the pupils towards the Romanian language lesson.

Hypotheses

With the use of the Gopo Method, pupils will:

1. They will be motivated to learn Romanian;

2. Students with lower abilities will also participate actively in Romanian language lessons;

3. They will progress in their level of Romanian language skills;

4. They will learn more new words;

5. They will use more lexical structures.

 Participants

The participants were preparatory class students from the Tășnad Secondary School, a total of 18 students, 10 girls and 8 boys.

Research tools

For most of the first semester, in the Romanian language lesson, we gave priority to traditional methods, and since December 13, we have held lessons using mainly the Gopo Method, alternating it sometimes with a traditional lesson.

We observed the children throughout the year, so we got an overview of the children's motivation, activity, ability to concentrate in the Romanian lesson and the extent to which they voluntarily commit themselves to speaking Romanian.

In terms of assessing the level of knowledge, we managed to individually assess students on 14 topics. Since the children in the preparatory class do not yet know how to read/write, we

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[6] Juhász, A. (15–16 decembrie 2022). *Use of the Gopo method in Romanian lesons held in Hungarian elementary classes.* Doctoral Students' Conference: Tradition, Development & Innovation in Didactics – Early Career Researchers Conference (TDID – ERC).

had to find a method of assessment that was effective and whereby the children would not feel frustrated during the assessment. Unfortunately we had nothing to assess before the intervention, as the children came from kindergarten with no knowledge of Romanian, except for one or two children. Therefore, at the beginning of the lesson we could easily assess the whole class verbally, and if there was someone who knew a word or two on a topic, we would note them. After the intervention we chose the method of conversation. The children were given independent tasks on the given topic, which often involved drawing or colouring, and while the class was busy, we talked to each child separately in the corner of the classroom set up for this purpose. We showed the child the picture or object associated with the given word and he had to name it in Romanian. We had an evaluation sheet in which we noted how many words, word structures and short sentences the child had memorized and also checked through helpful questions if he could use these words and phrases in communication. The class knew that Gopo needed to rest, therefore we spoke very quietly so as not to disturb him or the rest of the class while working.

In this way, it was possible to assess individually each student and summarize the results. We have taken the learning content for the topics from the workbook „Spune-mi, iubite copilaș" („Tell me, dear child").

Results/Conclusions

For children in the Hungarian preparatory class, Romanian is a completely new language. At the end of the Hungarian-language kindergarten period, it is a rare phenomenon for a child to know one or two words in Romanian related to a subject. The majority of the pupils prefer only singing accompanied by movement and recreational activities in Romanian language lessons. When children have to name objects or answer questions, they find it very difficult and lose interest. Gopo, the little elf from the forest, comes to their rescue and they love this. Their motivation increases, and with it their level of knowledge, too. During the lessons with traditional methods, only 6 of the 18 children were motivated, the others would have gladly exchanged the Romanian language lesson for physical education or manual work. During the lessons held with the Gopo Method, all 18 children were motivated and they were more or less active during the lessons. The positive change was most evident in the case of children with lower abilities. They became much more motivated and courageous. In lessons held with traditional methods, pupils managed to learn on average 4.69 words per topic, and with the Gopo

Method they learned with almost 2 words more: 6.48 words. In terms of lexical structures, with traditional methods they managed to learn on average 2.04 lexical structures and with the Gopo Method they managed to learn 3.01 lexical structures. Sentence formation was assessed on the basis of the answers given to the questions. In lessons taught with traditional methods the average number of sentences per topic was 1.65, while in lessons taught with the Gopo Method the number of sentences that students learned and used in Romanian was, on average, 2.25. In contrast to traditional lessons, the children did not even notice that we were working with the direct method during the Gopo lessons. They got used to the fact that they didn't need their mother tongue in order to communicate with Gopo. It was enough if they explained the message by gesturing with their hands and feet, and Gopo understood them (Juhasz, 2022).

CONCLUSIONS

The research presented in this paper is intended to help teachers who teach Romanian in Hungarian classes to make Romanian lessons more attractive and effective for elementary school pupils, as well as to help parents who are interested in the quality of their children's Romanian language skills.

The majority of the teachers interviewed (out of a total of 52 teachers) complement traditional teaching methods with alternative teaching methods in Romanian language lessons, often using different types of didactic games, role-playing games, dramatic games, situational games, interactive games and board games. More than half of the teachers who work in the Hungarian primary classes enjoy teaching Romanian and find it a challenge. Most of them prepare thoroughly for Romanian lessons. However, they often leave the classroom with an experience of failure after the Romanian lesson. They believe that the main cause of the problem is that pupils do not have the opportunity to practise Romanian outside school, and parents' attitudes towards Romanian do not always motivate their children enough to learn. There are also children who do not utter a word in Romanian classes. In such cases, teachers feel they are left alone with the problem. According to most teachers, only 30% of pupils could somehow get ahead in a Romanian environment. Therefore, parents are recommended to have family days when they speak only Romanian among themselves, to find Romanian-speaking friends for their children, to choose a Romanian environment when going on vacation, to watch/listen to programs made in Romanian as well as fairy tales, poems, songs, etc., to label objects at home in

Romanian, but first of all to set a good example to their children by their positive attitude towards Romanian.

This paper also reveals what children (545 pupils) think about the Romanian language lesson. The majority of children who study in Hungarian classes claim that they have no one to practice Romanian with at home. Half of the pupils learn Romanian because they believe they will need it in the future for further studies. They claim they do not give up learning Romanian even if they sometimes have difficulties. Most pupils usually raise their hands in Romanian language lessons, but some pupils find Romanian particularly difficult, so they do not speak at all in Romanian language lessons. Rural pupils have a significantly higher external motivation for learning Romanian than urban pupils. Pupils who consider that they have good language skills also have internal motivation for studying Romanian, positive feelings towards Romanian and Romanian language lessons, and therefore actively participate in Romanian language lessons.

The paper contains some research in which particular attention was paid to the use of board games in the Romanian language lesson in order to test the effectiveness of a possible alternative teaching method. Some teachers use board games only in their private life, but most of them bring board games to school as well. The most popular board game that teachers use both in their private life and at school is Activity. Most teachers consider the use of board games in the Romanian language lessons to be effective. According to them, the game facilitates communication in Romanian, enriches vocabulary and helps to overcome prejudices towards Romanian.

The thesis also details the design/testing/modification of a board game designed by the author for Hungarian-speaking children with the aim of vocabulary enrichment. The first version of the game is called Relax 1 and was tested at a summer camp. The duration of the game was about 50 minutes and since the children developed in many ways as a result of the game and enjoyed participating in it, this version of the game can be used in summer camps. Since the aim was to create a game that could also be used in the Romanian language lesson, Relax 1 went through various modifications inspired by the children's opinions. This gave birth to the second version of the game, called Relax 2. This game is different both in terms of content and duration. The children found the second game to be faster and more effective. The game lasts around 20 minutes, thus it can also be used in Romanian lessons.

The Relax 2 game was also tested in the classroom. The research participants were 4th grade students (21 children). The aim of the research was to evaluate the effectiveness of using the game in terms of vocabulary enrichment, development of sentence creating skills and pupils' attitudes towards Romanian. The research processed 14 topics, 7 of which were taught using traditional methods and the other 7 with the use of the board game. When the results obtained by using the two methods were compared, it was found that the students were able to learn almost with 2 new words more than through the traditional methods. Regarding the development of sentence building skills, 35.37% of the students managed to compose correct sentences in Romanian during the lessons held with traditional methods, while with the use of the board game 56.46% managed to compose correct sentences. In terms of motivation level, the pupils looked forward to the board game lessons. At the beginning of the survey 23.80% of the students claimed that they like Romanian and at the end of the survey 69.90% of the students managed to take a liking for Romanian.

The most extensive research from the paper was conducted by testing the Relax 2 game in different counties of the country among 3rd graders, with the participation of 212 students and 10 teachers. During the research, 10 topics were discussed with the children and there were also control groups. In 5 classes children were taught with traditional methods, and in the other 5 with the use of the Relax 2 board game. The aim was the same, to evaluate the effectiveness of the board game in enriching vocabulary, developing sentence building skills and pupils' attitudes towards the Romanian language. In addition to the assessment tests, the pupils answered a motivation test at the beginning and at the end of the research, and their teachers filled in a diary with aspects of the pupils' behaviour and level of knowledge. When comparing the results of the two methods, it was found that the pupils were able to learn with 3 words more (and to compose sentences in Romanian with them) with the use of the board game than with the traditional methods. With the use of the board game, the pupils' attitude towards the Romanian language evolved so that, by the end of the research, with 33.78% more children liked Romanian than before, when the lessons were taught with traditional methods. Based on the observations/notes of the teachers who participated in the research, it can be observed that children's motivation and level of knowledge increased with the use of board games compared to the use of traditional methods.

The thesis also reports the results of another research, namely the research on the effectiveness of the Gopo Method in Romanian language lessons. The aim of the research was to evaluate the effectiveness of using the Gopo Method in terms of vocabulary enrichment, the use of expressions and sentence building. The research took place in a preparatory class with 18 children. The Gopo Method was used for a whole school year, during which time the researcher's method was only observation. During the teaching of the 14 subjects the research included assessment of the level of knowledge. 7 topics were taught with traditional methods and 7 with the Gopo Method. The results show that students were able to learn with about 2 (1.79) more new words and one (0.97) expression. Regarding sentence building, the difference in favour of the Gopo Method is smaller: an average of 0.60 more sentences. The most important result of this research is that Gopo, the little elf, succeeded in getting even the most shy and withdrawn children to talk. During the lessons held with the use of traditional methods, 6 out of 18 children were motivated, but with the Gopo Method all 18 children became motivated and, at their request, we also worked with this method in the first grade.

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