



ORIGINAL PAPER

Integrated Approach to Teaching and Learning Romanian as a Foreign Language

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Abstract:

Integrated teaching-learning of Romanian as a foreign language constitutes a novel approach to the teaching process, based on interactive strategies, collaboration and cooperation, with the emphasis on the foreign student. This type of innovative approach involves involvement, creativity, flexibility, the creation of an environment conducive to learning Romanian as a foreign language and Romanian culture and civilization as an integral part of the process of training and integrating foreign students into a social environment different from the one they come from. Therefore, the formation of verbal-communicative skills in the process of integrated learning of Romanian as a foreign language constitutes the starting point, then moving on to establishing a theme based on the motivational factors and communication needs of foreign students, to developing the skills of receiving the oral message, receiving the written message, oral expression, written expression, pronunciation, use of vocabulary and grammar. In this process of integrated teaching-learning of Romanian as a foreign language, a series of strategies will be used to facilitate the assimilation of the Romanian language by foreign students both at the linguistic and cultural levels.

Keywords: *cultural, integrated, linguistic, teaching-learning, Romanian language*

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Introduction

The efficiency of learning a foreign language also depends a lot on the level of difficulty of a newly learned language, which depends on several factors. For example, how close the new language is to the native one or to other known ones, how complex it is, how many hours are allocated each week to studying it, as well as motivation. Thus, for those who study Romanian as a foreign language, a series of difficulties may arise related to the specific grammatical structure, the phonetic system in particular, because here we have several sounds (and letters) specific to our language. Learning Romanian as a foreign language offers new content and emphasizes: developing the student's autonomy; introducing a greater number of variables from different fields of sociocultural knowledge; improving receptor capacities; restructuring the scope of content and resizing them on the values of national and universal culture; integrating the spheres of personality development: cognitive (intellectual), technological (psychometric), attitudinal (motivational-affective).

Therefore, the great advantage of integrated teaching-learning of Romanian as a foreign language is the fact that it directly relates to several of the key competences stipulated in the European Framework of Reference for Lifelong Learning. (Gîncu, 2014: 16): communication in Romanian as a foreign language (the ability to use a foreign language to communicate, understand and be understood), interpersonal skills (the ability to communicate and interact effectively with different people, including empathy and mutual understanding), intercultural skills (the ability to navigate and interact appropriately in multicultural environments, respecting and understanding cultural differences) and civic skills (knowledge and responsible participation in the life of society, understanding the civic rights and responsibilities of a student in a foreign country), cultural awareness and artistic expression (awareness, appreciation and respect for various cultural expressions, whether traditional or contemporary), assimilation of cultural knowledge (the ability to express yourself through art and to accumulate knowledge about various forms of art and cultures, contributing to a deeper understanding of the cultural heritage of the foreign country in which you are a student).

These competences represent an integrated set of essential skills in the educational and professional context, encompassing effective communication (in Romanian as a foreign language), the ability to interact (interpersonal, intercultural), civic understanding and participation, as well as a dual dimension of culture: on the one hand, an awareness and understanding of cultural values, and on the other hand, an artistic expression and knowledge of the cultural diversity of the country where you are studying. This set of competences is vital for adaptation in the globalized society, fostering mutual understanding, collaboration and active participation in the life of the community where you are. They contribute to personal development, allowing foreign students to broaden their perspectives and interact more effectively in a complex and dynamic world, perhaps different from their native environment.

One of the objectives of the integrated study process of the Romanian language as a foreign language and the respective culture is the formation and development of a person - the foreign student - capable of demonstrating attitude, empathy and respect for both his own culture and the one studied. The degree of formality of this ability may be different, but the final goal is the stage of adaptation of the foreign student, when the linguistic picture of the personality expands to such an extent that he can include in his own behavioral model models from the foreign culture and the cultural values that underlie it.

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The way in which a teaching-learning activity is carried out is directly interdependent with the context. This plays a decisive role, whether we are talking about an informal (family, colleagues, friends), formal (school) or non-formal (educational games and other activities) context. From our point of view, all three are equally important and each one has its essential role. Since, in the present case, learning the Romanian language takes place in Romania, within the Romanian community, culture and spirituality. In attempts to identify difficulties in the process of teaching-learning the Romanian language as a foreign language, several aspects must be taken into account: the status of a language is perceived differently by the people who learn it, by those who teach it and by the context.

Foreign students who learn Romanian as a foreign language in our country will perceive it differently than those who learn it in their countries of origin or in another foreign country, even if they learn it from a Romanian lecturer or within a Romanian language lecturership, in a country where Romanian is one of the official languages and/or is accepted. Establishing the context, it should be specified that the groups of foreign students who follow the preparatory year courses of the Romanian language: both from the point of view of age, and from the social, ethnic, racial, sexual, intellectual, spiritual, religious, but also anxious and motivational point of view are heterogeneous. The goal, however, is the same: learning the Romanian language.

Communication in a foreign language has the same dimensions as communication in the mother tongue: it is based on the ability to understand, express and interpret thoughts, feelings and facts both orally and in writing (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in an appropriate range of social contexts – at work, at home, in education and training – according to the individual's wishes or needs. Communication in a foreign language also calls on the skills of mediation and cultural understanding. The level of performance will vary across the four dimensions, between different languages and according to the individual's linguistic heritage and background. So, "For an effective communication between groups or individuals belonging to different cultures, it is necessary to be aware of one's own stereotypes and to overcome them, thus creating a meeting space based on common values that ensure the functioning of a real dialogue" (Lăpădat, L., Lăpădat M.-M., 2020: 141).

Language barriers further intensify the learning process, characterized by the complexities of Romanian vocabulary and phonetics, which can pose obstacles for non-native speakers. Thus, according to what Chirițescu and Păunescu said:

"A core characteristic of language is its connectivity to its speakers, as the speakers grow and evolve or even possibly devolve, so does the language. Complex and specialised language is the concrete manifestation of a powerful and diverse society. The living, transformational nature of language should be approached systemically based on merging social evolution with geographic and cultural proliferations. One can even wonder if language is the product of society or maybe, to some extent, language itself can influence the way a society functions or behaves. Linking language to nationality can sometimes even outsource the economic status of the speaker. A wealthy individual may speak a different form of language compared to an extremely pauper citizen though they share the same nationality and exist within the same immediate geography. These additional variations have also come to link language with power; therefore, it is not only important to play the part but also to act the part, climbing the social

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ladder often brings forth expectations of linguistic evolution and adaptation" (Chirișescu, Păunescu, 2021: 94).

In addition, cultural disparities between international students and Romanian society generate some challenges, requiring increased cultural sensitivity and pedagogical adaptation to facilitate effective communication and social integration. primary obstacles encountered in learning Romanian as a foreign language, emphasizing linguistic barriers and cultural disparities.

Pragmatic acquisition of a foreign language involves the assimilation of knowledge related to the content of verbal and nonverbal signs of culture. We believe that the proposed system of integrated acquisition of a foreign language and its culture involves the acquisition of a set of knowledge and experiences (activities and relationships) that allow students to be active participants in intercultural communication. These include: understanding the styles of verbal expression and their meanings, behavioral patterns, appropriate coding and decoding of the cultural, historical and everyday elements of the country, the culture of the target language in situations where newspapers, magazines, artistic literature are read, films and television programs are watched, communication with speakers of the foreign language and culture, understanding their behavior.

The lack of necessary knowledge and experience are impediments, blockages in the process of familiarizing oneself with the language and culture of a foreign country, causing, in the process of studying, various reactions, from rejection to "dissolution" in it.

This type of reaction presupposes both the ability to see current events from the position of one's own culture and from that of the foreign culture, correlating with the concept of acculturation: "Acculturation includes those phenomena that result when groups of people with different cultures come into direct contact, constantly, which have as an effect subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of one or both groups" (Fons J. R. Van de Vijver, 2015: 26).

Acculturation is defined as the borrowing of behaviors, values by a group from another group with which it comes into contact. Contemporary societies are directly confronted with these contacts, direct or indirect, between different groups. Thus: "Traditionally, the forms of cultural contact are acculturation (...). Acculturation is the process of change in material culture, in traditional practices and in beliefs, a process that occurs when a people interferes with the cultural system of another people, causing the latter, directly or indirectly, to adapt to the former" (*Enciclopedia Universală Britannica*, 2010: 202).

Even though the acculturation process is seen as positive, there are situations in which it can have negative connotations, especially in situations in which the person who acquires a second language, implicitly culture, feels rejected either by the new culture in which he or she tends to integrate, or by his or her own culture. In these cases, situations of cultural identity crisis may arise, moreover, one can speak of acculturation stress (anxiety, depression, feeling of marginalization, exclusion, psychosomatic illnesses, etc.). Researchers in the field believe that in the acculturation process, several stages of development of the process can be identified: tolerance, acceptance, adaptation, assimilation and integration (Fons J. R. Van de Vijver, 2015: 25-31).

Integrated teaching-learning of Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) involves combining various strategies, such as gamification, narrative pedagogy, cultural and civilizational understanding, and digital tools, to enhance motivation and acquisition of Romanian as a foreign language for non-native speakers. This integrated approach focuses

on developing basic skills, such as understanding, speaking, and writing through authentic contexts, cultural immersion, and the use of frameworks such as the CEFR. Modern RFL pedagogy also emphasizes creating an engaging learning environment that encourages self-expression and helps foreign students develop both linguistic and intercultural identities.

- **Cultural Immersion:**

Incorporates workshops, excursions, visits to museums, and cultural evenings to immerse students in Romanian customs and traditions: "Teaching Romanian as a foreign language to foreign students cannot be done only linguistically, but also requires a cultural approach, so that in the end, the students who will stay in Romania integrate and assimilate much more easily from a social point of view" (Burtea-Cioroianu, C.-E., 2024: 75).

- **Practical Focus:**

Emphasizes the functional-communicative dimension of language learning, teaching foreign students how to use Romanian effectively in everyday situations. To effectively use Romanian as a foreign language in everyday life, foreign students need to practice their skills through constant practice, engaging in everyday activities that use the language, and seeking opportunities to converse with native speakers. These activities include listening to podcasts or music, watching movies and series in Romanian, reading the news or books in Romanian, as well as conversing with native speakers and using online apps and resources. It is also helpful for foreign students to build a basic vocabulary, practice grammar, and immerse themselves in Romanian culture.

- **Narrative Pedagogy:**

Encouraging foreign students to use storytelling and blogs creates relevance, personal connection, and authenticity in their learning, boosting motivation and confidence. The educational achievements achieved through narrative storytelling approaches allow teachers of Romanian as a foreign language to create relevant learning environments in which foreign students improve their educational outcomes through narratives and improvisational strategies. Such instruction in Romanian as a foreign language allows students to create their own stories, allowing them to express unique opinions and emotionally charged content, while highlighting cultural elements.

This narrative pedagogy can allow foreign students to collaborate on stories, improving their speaking skills and transforming educational Romanian into a tool for personal communication. The rich cultural content of storytelling provides educational opportunities that encourage the development of inclusive classrooms, while enhancing the intercultural language skills of native Romanian speakers. This demonstrates that foreign students can learn about their ancestral beliefs and traditional culture through an ELT platform in which storytelling is integrated into teaching techniques.

- **Cultural integration:**

The current process of teaching and learning Romanian as a foreign language focuses both on the marked culturalization of the contents and on the orientation towards the practical field. The transmission of knowledge of Romanian as a foreign language can no longer be separated from the transmission of knowledge of culture and civilization. That is why, in this field, the concepts of interculturality and intercultural communication are increasingly used, which argue for differences from a cultural perspective, and understanding these differences and their cultural contexts becomes the central objective of the process of teaching and learning Romanian as a foreign language. Learning Romanian as a foreign language is thus seen as a process of self-transcendence, which leads to an increased intercultural identity, as learners negotiate a new cultural reality

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alongside their original identity. So, teaching history and cultural heritage to students from different backgrounds fosters a shared understanding and sense of common heritage. Mutual understanding and connection is important in this case, because it requires an ability to understand and respect the cultural perspectives of others, leading to a deeper connection than just observing differences.

"The cultural diversity of the participants in the courses of teaching the Romanian language as a foreign language to foreign students does nothing but deepen certain problems related to their adaptation to new cultures and traditions, to new ways of communication and understanding. Foreign students who come to our country and are in permanent contact with a new culture and language but also with other colleagues belonging to other countries and other customs, have a tendency to lose their cultural specificity, to move away from their traditional background, generator of the feeling of national identity, precisely from the desire to integrate more quickly in a new sociocultural context. Many of the foreign students come with the idea of settling in our country after finishing their studies, and then they somehow feel obliged to understand our culture and traditions, to adhere to them, even if for them the differences are major" (Burtea-Cioroianu, 2022: 137).

- **Interactive and Modern Methods:**

It uses interactive activities, technology (including online platforms and whiteboards) and a variety of materials, such as dialogues from everyday life and Romanian music, to create learning of Romanian as a foreign language by foreign students.

Modern methods of teaching Romanian as a foreign language prioritize interactivity, student-centered approaches and the integration of technology, while traditional methods often rely on lectures and teacher-led instruction. This shift encourages active involvement and collaboration between teacher and student, making learning more dynamic and adaptable to diverse needs. Modern teaching methods are transforming education, fostering innovation and preparing foreign students for a rapidly evolving world. By adopting these methods, educators can create vibrant, inclusive and effective learning environments that meet the diverse needs of today's students. Whether through technology, personalized learning or active engagement, the future of teaching lies in embracing change and innovation. The attractiveness of modern methods, where interactivity is the basis of learning, is undoubted, if we compare it with traditional approaches. For example: "A system for learning multiple languages is Duolingo, designed as a platform with 120 million users; everything takes place in the form of complex exercises in reading, listening, translation, multiple-choice questions and assessment during the lesson. Grammar concepts are taught in close connection with vocabulary. The Duolingo system has the advantage of informing you after each assessment about the level at which you are" (Borș, 2016: 54).

- **Content Diversity:**

Uses diverse materials and activities, including press articles, Internet resources, and fragments of literary works, tailored to students' interests and fields of study:

"Like languages, teaching methods change as technology develops. For the new generations, the teaching-learning process must be dynamic and inevitably include digital teaching aids and materials. Surprisingly, however, while teaching, we have found that students, although digitally adept at sending short messages, creating interesting video clips, have problems in writing their

work in Word, Power Point or similar programs. Thus, we considered that on top of the traditional ways of forming writing skills, introducing storytelling and blogging in our course is an answer to their need for digitalization and creativity, but also a means to enhance their digital skills beyond the ones developed during the interactions on social media platforms" (Barbu, 2024: 31-32).

- **Gamification:**

Incorporating game-based elements and digital platforms (like Kahoot!, Plickers, and Storyjumper) makes the learning process more interactive and enjoyable, promoting intrinsic motivation and participation of foreign students in learning the Romanian language.

"Regarding motivation, the very essence of learning, the concept of gamification can bring fun and pleasure to learning. Nowadays, extrinsic triggers, such as high grades, certain advantages or even praise, are no longer enough to motivate students, but the fundamental elements that define gamification can represent the perfect catalysts to favor the transition to a new approach in education. Even if extrinsic motivation cannot substitute for intrinsic motivation, it can accompany, generate and cultivate it in a gamification-based path. (...) the concept of gamification: people, driven by curiosity, choose to play a game because they believe they can have certain benefits, because the elements and strategies present in the game can bring them happiness or pleasure. In the case of self-determination, people are encouraged to be creative, but without generating chaos, since even if there are rules, they leave room for freedom of choice, and since they are not alone, players can share the pleasure with others, thus creating an ideal situation, where people undertake an activity solely because of the pleasure it generates for them" (Nechifor, et alii, 2023: 35).

- **Digital and blended learning:**

The use of technology in education improves accessibility, personalizes learning experiences, and enables the delivery of interactive and engaging content. These advances ensure that international students from different countries and cultures can interact and participate effectively and succeed in their Romanian language learning journey. Digital tools and blended learning approaches (combining online and face-to-face interactions) offer flexibility and create engaging learning environments for foreign students that can connect virtual and real-world contexts. As technology and art intertwine in increasingly complex and creative ways, innovative educational platforms and applications play a crucial role as educational tools. These digital tools not only facilitate wider access to knowledge, but also redefine the way knowledge is created, shared, and experienced.

Teachers can incorporate modern methods by integrating technology, making use of well-designed LMS platforms and virtual classrooms. They can foster collaboration and engagement among students through group projects and discussions. They can also design lesson plans emphasizing project-based and experiential learning to make concepts more engaging and practical.

Technology transforms modern teaching by enhancing accessibility, personalizing learning experiences and fostering interactive environments. Tools like LMS platforms and virtual classrooms allow teachers to deliver content efficiently, engage foreign students actively and adapt teaching methods to meet individual learning needs.

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"E-learning, known as "e-learning" or, more recently, as "e-education", is represented by the interaction between the teaching-learning process and information technologies. Elearning is now more than a concept, it is part of current education, tending to become increasingly sought after through the time savings involved. E-learning means, in an unconsecrated definition, the chance for a person to get information easily, quickly, in any field, not being conditioned by a physical support (paper books) or an intermediary (teacher). This concept allows the educational process to be flexible to offer the widest range of e-books, tips, images and text. Internet learning can be defined as a form of education in which students are presented with training content via the Internet. Therefore, the basic condition imposed on participants in the learning process is the possession of a computer and an Internet connection. When it comes to supporting the program that is used in internet education, most often the so-called course tools are used, which allow the storage of educational content on a Web server, the creation of communication networks between the participants in the process. education, learning and management, allowing the independent testing of their knowledge through various tests. (...) Online learning is often a kind of blended learning, a learning in which teaching methods, materials and means vary, in which study materials are predominantly visual and auditory requiring the spirit of observation and the development of perceptual skills specific to phonemic hearing. Of course, for the Romanian language, the development of phonemic hearing involves performing exercises for listening and rendering the correct pronunciation of words with the possibility of listening and self-correction" (Burtea-Cioroianu, 2022: 134-135).

- **Focus on communication:**

Modern approaches to learning Romanian by foreign students move from a simple focus on grammar and vocabulary to developing effective communication strategies relevant to real-world situations. Current methods of learning Romanian as a foreign language prioritize the application of the language in concrete contexts, such as discussions, interviews or problem-solving, as opposed to the isolated study of grammatical rules. Thus, an important objective is for foreign students to be able to communicate fluently and correctly in Romanian in real-life situations, adapted to their specific needs, whether it is professional or social life. Thus, the emphasis shifts to developing strategies that help foreign students manage conversations, understand the speaker's intention and express their ideas clearly, even if they do not know a specific word.

There are certain benefits but also challenges in the integrated teaching-learning of Romanian as a foreign language. Thus, we have as benefits a high motivation of foreign students in the learning process, promoted by gamified systems, personalized narratives but also by integrated methods that facilitate the development of all four linguistic skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) through practical and authentic activities. Another benefit would be the facilitation of the social and cultural integration of foreign students through their interaction with their colleagues and the community in general. Contextualized learning of Romanian as a foreign language connects foreign students with real-world contexts, helping them to understand Romanian culture and develop a new intercultural identity.

Regarding the challenges of integrated teaching-learning of Romanian as a foreign language, these refer both to teachers who have to adapt their methods to the

diverse backgrounds of foreign students and to the potentially different prior knowledge of the target language, as well as to foreign students who may encounter difficulties adapting to a new cultural and linguistic space, requiring support to navigate these differences.

Conclusions

Studying in a foreign country offers invaluable opportunities for personal and professional development for international students. International students benefit from access to high-quality academic programs, which often involve innovative teaching approaches. In addition, this experience gives them the chance to connect with professors and colleagues from diverse cultural backgrounds. Teaching-learning activity has borne fruit when it has focused more on communication and interactivity than on the mechanical learning of morphosyntactic elements (these being acquired in the process of communicating in Romanian).

The process of integrated teaching and learning of Romanian as a foreign language, which can be given the intercultural attribute, has a dual role: on the one hand, of maintaining identity by making foreign students aware of their mother tongue and their own culture, and on the other hand, of developing fields of action by developing the intercultural communication competence of foreign students. Knowledge of Romanian as a foreign language guarantees, in a broad sense, the foreign student's access to social life and success in professional life. However, full success does not depend only on linguistic competence in the target language, Romanian in our case, but also on a set of communication and sociocultural competences that allow both the approach, perception, interpretation and understanding of the foreign/target environment, as well as intercultural dialogue, which is why an integrated teaching and assimilation of Romanian as a foreign language is necessary.

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