

## **A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE OLD AND NEW CURRICULUM FOR ROMANIAN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

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*Abstract: Starting with September 2017, all Romanian language and literature teachers have faced a new challenge in the teaching process, the approval a new curriculum for secondary students, whose main purpose is to contribute to the development of key competences which are essential in the lifelong learning process and which are part of a globalized educational system. At present, teachers and secondary level students have to teach and learn using two curriculums, one valid for 5<sup>th</sup> graders starting with 2017 school year, while the second one, already seen as old, is valid for 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. The paper aims at making a comparative analysis between the two curriculums in terms of their structure and content in order to outline the similarities and differences between them.*

*Keywords: comparative analysis, curriculum, Romanian, competences, language, literature.*

### **Introduction**

School curriculum represents a document that synthesizes the syllabus specific to each subject and to each educational level, having a formal, unitary and mandatory character. Through its content, the curriculum is the main guide for the teaching activity, having an instructive and operational value. It is the document from which the didactic design approach starts, leaving the teacher enough room for showing formative autonomy and creativity. One of the features of school curriculum is that it should be flexible to the circumstances of learning, allowing the teacher to propose new topics and subtopics according to the students' concrete needs and opportunities. Starting from this assumption, in the Romanian secondary educational level, 2017 represented a new beginning in terms of curriculum design, as teachers and students had to face a new challenge, that of having to start teaching and learning all subjects on a new curriculum. The present paper aims at identifying the similarities and differences of the curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education in September 2017 and the one which was valid from September 2009 to June 2017 in the case of Romanian language and literature taught in secondary schools.

As easily understood, Romanian language and literature plays an important role in the formation of students' personality, of their skills and abilities necessary to ensure post-school access to lifelong learning and active integration into a knowledge-based society.

During compulsory education, students must firstly develop the necessary communication skills required by the contemporary world for any type of professional activity: to express correctly, clearly and coherently in Romanian, to listen, to understand and to produce oral and written messages in various communication situations. Being a compulsory subject of the national curriculum, Romanian language ensures the development of all necessary communication skills in all fields of knowledge and activity.

### **The Romanian language and literature curriculum - past and future**

At the beginning of the 2009 school year, the curriculum of Romanian language and literature for secondary school level came into force. The curriculum was elaborated from the

perspective of the transition from the curricular design model focused on objectives – developed and implemented in the Romanian education system in the mid 90's – to the competency model.

The curriculum included the following components:

1. Presentation note
2. General, social and civic competencies;
3. Values and attitudes;
4. Specific competences and associated contents;
5. Contents;
6. Methodological suggestions.

The subject specific domains for grades 5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> were: literary texts, rational and functional language practice and communication.

As the primary school system was subject to a change beginning with 2012, when the preparatory grade became compulsory, all primary school curriculums were gradually changed. As far as Romanian language is concerned, primary school pupils study *Communication in Romanian Language (grades 0 – 2)* and *Romanian language and literature (grades 3 – 4)*. As a result, the first generation to start the 5<sup>th</sup> grade in 2017 needed a new curriculum, a normal continuation of the one from primary school so, the change that took place in September 2017 was more than welcome. Thus, the 2017 curriculum included the following components:

1. Presentation note;
2. General competencies;
3. Specific competences and learning activities;
4. Contents;
5. Methodological suggestions.

Beginning with the *Presentation Note* of the both curriculums, the specific psycho-pedagogical principles underlying their elaboration are clearly stated, in order to ensure a structural renewal of the acquisition of the Romanian language in school. There are, however, some differences between the notes, in the sense that the 2017 curriculum emphasizes the importance of developing key competences such as communication in the mother tongue and cultural awareness and expression, the latter not being included in the 2009 curriculum.

The training of communicative competence in the mother tongue (Romanian) should be focused on the development of didactic activities that aim at:

- “- searching, collecting, processing information and receiving opinions, ideas, feelings in a variety of listened messages / texts read;
- expressing information, opinions, ideas, feelings, in oral or written messages, by adapting to the communicative situation;
- participating in verbal interactions in various curricular and extra-curricular contexts, within a proactive dialogue.” (Romanian Language and Literature Curriculum, 2017, p. 2).

The development of cultural awareness and expression should be done, according to the curriculum, taking into account the age-specific peculiarities of the secondary school student, in order to support him in the complex process of understanding the role of cultural and linguistic identity. Specific activities designed to form this competence are explicitly formulated in the *Presentation note* and these include:

- “- appreciating some defining elements of the local cultural context and of the national and universal heritage;
- designing creative works using various environments, including digital one, in curricular and extra-curricular contexts;

- participating in cultural projects and events organized in formal or non-formal contexts.” (Romanian Language and Literature Curriculum, 2017, p. 2).

The purpose of studying Romanian language and literature during compulsory education is to form a young person with a basic communicative and literary culture, capable of understanding the world, of communicating and interacting with others, of making efficient and creative use of the ability to solve concrete problems in everyday life in order to be able to continue the learning process at any stage of his/her existence, to be sensitive to the beauty of the world. Therefore, according to the 2017 curriculum, it should comprise three major components:

“- the linguistic component, belonging to the language sciences, which ensures the correct, conscious and efficient use of the language;

- the inter-relational component, belonging to the communication sciences, which favors the social insertion of the individual;

- the aesthetic and cultural component, belonging to literature, or the art of words, which ensures the complex development of the human personality.” (Romanian Language and Literature Curriculum, p. 2).

What the 2017 curriculum emphasizes are the 3 components of the subject, that is *the linguistic component* which should ensure the correct, conscious and efficient use of the language, *the inter-relational component*, which should favors the social insertion of the individual and *the aesthetic and cultural component of literature*, which should ensures the complex development of the human personality. All these components are part of the new educational paradigm to which the whole curriculum is subordinated, aiming at appropriateness to the national socio-cultural archetype combined with the universal one, transdisciplinary openness, and a strong correlation with maternal language and literature curriculums in Romania and other countries. (2017).

Regarding the *general competencies* included in both curriculums, one can notice the difference of the two in terms of their number and the way in which they are formulated. The table below indicates them as specified in the two curriculums:

Table 1. General competencies in the two curriculums

2009 curriculum	2017 curriculum
Reception of oral messages in different communication situations	Taking part in verbal interactions in various communication situations by receiving and producing the oral messages
Correct and proper use of Romanian language in producing oral messages in communication situations (monologue and dialogue);	Reception of various types of written texts
Reception of written messages from literary and non-literary texts, for various purposes	Writing various types of texts
Correct and proper use of Romanian language in producing written messages in different contexts, with various purposes	Proper, appropriate and effective use of language in the oral and written communication process
	Expressing the linguistic and cultural identity in a national and international context

(Source: Romanian Language and Literature Curriculum, 2009, p. 4)	Source: (Romanian Language and Literature Curriculum, 2017, p. 4)
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As known, the competencies have a high degree of generality and complexity (Cucoş, 2006) and they aim at directing the teaching approach towards the students' final acquisition, communication being the core concept around which they are formulated in this case. It should be noticed that that the new general competencies aim not only at receiving and developing acquisitions in Romanian, but also, very importantly, their use in various situations and with various purposes.

However, the most important part of the Romanian Language and Literature curriculum is the one that refers to specific competences and contents. Specific competences are derived from general competences, representing important steps in their development. Thus, for each general competence specific competencies have been generated, and each of them has associated contents or learning activities. If comparing the two curriculums, one can notice that the 2017 one includes, for each specific competence, clear suggestions of learning activities that teachers should do during the Romanian classes for each grade.

For each grade, the curriculums specify content domains, organized as shown in the table below:

Table 2. Contents in the two curriculums

2009 curriculum	2017 curriculum
Readings	Oral communication
The rational and functional practice of language (oral and written communication)	Readings
Communication components (vocabulary, phonetics, morphology, the syntax of the simple sentence and the syntax of the complex sentence)	Writing
	Communication components (grammar, pronunciation and orthography, vocabulary, stylistics)
	Intercultural elements (personal, national identity, cultural and linguistic diversity, printed and digital books, behavior models in Greek and Latin legends, ethic values in the legends of other nations, the linguistic community of native speakers of Romanian all over the world, Romanian mythology, cultural contact with neighboring countries, behavior models from world literature, constructive cultural relations – we and the others, Romanian cultural values worldwide).
(Source: Romanian Language and Literature Curriculum, 2009)	Source: (Romanian Language and Literature Curriculum, 2017)

As seen in the table above, the new curriculum is more detailed in terms of contents and the contents referring to the intercultural dimension of the subject represent something completely new to students and teachers. Moreover, in terms of contents, it indicates for each grade a general topic that should be covered by textbooks and teachers with the students. The topics are the following:

- 5<sup>th</sup> grade: Me and my familiar universe;
- 6<sup>th</sup> grade: Me and the world around me;
- 7<sup>th</sup> grade: World and knowledge horizons;
- 8<sup>th</sup> grade: Reflections on the world.

Although this represents something new, both curriculums contain a series of recommendations addressed to teachers on how to select texts to study. It is the teacher's choice to use certain learning activities, considered to be appropriate in order to achieve the general and specific competencies associated with each content area. The teacher's freedom to choose the appropriate support texts to highlight the concepts of reading reflects the relationship between school curriculum and the textbook, as a flexible working tool, adaptable to the concrete needs of the group of students. Keeping in mind a student-centered approach, teachers will adapt their teaching to the students' real needs, both in the selection of texts for study (literary and non-literary ones, belonging to different species and genres) and that of teaching methods that should increase students' involvement and interaction in solving concrete learning tasks, as well as their motivation.

*The methodological suggestions* include a series of general recommendations on how to apply the Romanian language and literature curriculum. These refer to the effective delivery of the teaching-learning process centered on competence development, as well as on the methods, learning activities and evaluation strategies to be applied. Thus, as far as the *methodological suggestions*, included in both curriculums are concerned, it can be noticed that the ones from the 2017 version are more detailed and provide teachers with concrete examples of projects they can do with their students, especially for the development of the 5<sup>th</sup> general competence, which is new, but somehow justified, taken into consideration the emphasis laid at present on students' personal development through awareness of their national identity profile. Along with the competencies, the new curriculum proposes activities by means of which students can monitor their own learning. It allows both students and teachers to manifest their creativity, eliminating over-theoretical approaches and ensuring flexibility and efficiency in the process of developing key competences, by permanently taking into account the representative elements of the Romanian and the world culture.

A difference between the two curriculums is the absence in the 2017 version of the *Values and attitudes* section. In the 2009 form, values and attitudes appear in the form of a list and guide the axiological and affective-attitudinal dimensions specific to personality formation from the perspective of Romanian language and literature. These are just as important as competences, but they are subject to other organization criteria of didactic-methodological and evaluation and this may be a possible explanation for not being included in the curriculum anymore.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of the paper was to make a presentation of the curriculum used by Romanian language and literature teachers in secondary schools, underlying the similarities and differences between the two versions which are in use at present in all Romanian schools. No matter these similarities and differences what is really important for both students and teachers is that the teaching principles guiding the teaching-learning-assessment process should emphasize the interactive character of language acquisition and they should focus on active learning and

continuous assessment in order to “translate school activities into real sociolinguistic environments, in non-formal and informal contexts, and re-create ‘outside realities’ in the classroom.” (Romanian Language and Literature Curriculum, 2017, p. 25). Taking into account the fact that 5<sup>th</sup> graders this year are the first to benefit from the new curriculum and textbooks in accordance to it, it is our belief that future research can focus on students’ and teachers’ opinions on its usefulness and reliability.

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