

# **Experimental Program For School Integration Of Re-Migrant Middle School Students With Learning Difficulties In Romanian Language And Literature**

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# Experimental Program For School Integration Of Re-Migrant Middle School Students With Learning Difficulties In Romanian Language And Literature

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

learning difficulties; integration; migration; remigration; Romanian language and literature; vocabulary; syntax; text comprehension; performance.

*In contemporary society, the phenomena of territorial mobility / geographical mobility - migration (internal or external) and return migration / remigration (determined or forced), phenomena determined by various social and economic factors, are significantly accentuated. These complex and sensitive phenomena are increasingly attracting the interest of researchers and are often investigated in a multi- and interdisciplinary manner, with various implications: demographic, sociological, psychological, educational, axiological etc. From an educational perspective, external migration and return migration / family migration can have a major impact on children and various influences, which can be analyzed in formal, non-formal and informal contexts. The study approaches in formal educational contexts, a topic less explored in the literature, although it springs from the current educational reality. The analyzed issue was inspired by the didactic experience, as well as by the common interest of the professional community of teachers and of the scientific community for identifying and removing the difficulties encountered by re-migrant students in the Romanian educational system.*

## Zusammenfassung

### Schlüsselworte:

Lernschwierigkeiten; Integration; Migration; Rückwanderung; Rumänische Sprache und Literatur; Wortschatz; Syntax; Textverständnis; Performance

*In der heutigen Gesellschaft werden die Phänomene der territorialen Mobilität / geografischen Mobilität - Migration (intern oder extern) und Rückwanderung / Remigration (bestimmt oder erzwungen), Phänomene, die durch verschiedene soziale und wirtschaftliche Faktoren bestimmt werden, erheblich akzentuiert. Diese komplexen und sensiblen Phänomene ziehen zunehmend das Interesse von Forschern auf sich und werden häufig multi- und interdisziplinär untersucht, mit verschiedenen Auswirkungen: demografisch, soziologisch, psychologisch, pädagogisch, axiologisch usw. Aus pädagogischer Sicht externe Migration und Rückwanderung / Familiennmigration kann einen großen Einfluss auf Kinder und verschiedene Einflüsse haben, die in formellen, nicht formalen und informellen Kontexten analysiert werden können. Die Studie befasst sich mit formalen Bildungskontexten, ein Thema, das in der Literatur weniger erforscht ist, obwohl es aus der aktuellen Bildungsrealität stammt. Das analysierte Thema wurde von der didaktischen Erfahrung sowie vom gemeinsamen Interesse der Berufsgemeinschaft der Lehrer und der wissenschaftlichen Gemeinschaft inspiriert, die Schwierigkeiten zu identifizieren und zu beseitigen, auf die Schüler mit Migrationshintergrund im rumänischen Bildungssystem stoßen.*

## 1. Introduction

Every year, hundreds of Romanian families decide to go abroad, in order to find a better job. A large part of them took their children with them, to prevent some traumas among the little ones or to keep them in parental care. Due to the economic crisis or family problems, a large number of families who have gone abroad, return to the country. Once back, middle school students face great difficulties in learning and accommodation, because they think in another language and in most cases, students communicate more correctly in the language of the country where they grew up than in Romanian. A large part of the number of re-migrant students never had contact with the Romanian school, being born abroad. They have

almost no command of the Romanian language, they have faced a different linguistic context. For re-migrant students, the Romanian school is difficult to access.

## 2. Theoretical foundation

In the literature are specified different definitions of the concept of learning difficulties, designed from different perspectives, depending on which the concept was investigated. It cannot be said that a general definition has been reached, because this concept is complex and as the definitions are formulated at the moment, the variants only partially cover the investigated reality.

Praxiological Dictionary of Pedagogy. Volume I: A-D (Bocoș (coord.), Răduț-Taciu, Stan, 2016, p. 339) gives us a clear and complex definition of the term learning difficulty. Thus, in a broad pedagogical/educational sense, the term refers to a set of obstacles, as well as moments of oscillation, which materialize in a set of particular manifestations, involved in the development of the personality of an individual who is involved in a continuous process for studying. In a narrow pedagogical/educational sense, learning difficulties are correlated with a faulty, weak or deficient organization of the approaches and learning activity performed by students, an organization that can have negative consequences on: acquisition - perception and reception, organization, retention, comprehension/understanding, processing/processing of information (verbal and nonverbal), rendering, expressing, transmitting/communicating them.

From the etymological point of view, the word "integra" comes from the Latin **integro, integration and integrationis**, used with the meaning to renew, complete. The handiest definition is given by the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language (Academia Română, Institutul de Lingvistică „Iorgu Iordan”), thus, the integration is presented as "1. Inclusion in a collective; 2. Incorporation into a whole."

Gherguț (2006, p. 17) argues that integration involves "placing or transferring a person from a more or less segregated environment to an ordinary one, aiming at the set of measures that apply to various categories of the population, and seeks to remove the separation in all its forms (the term segregation is relative and can be applied to all children and individuals, as well as to all aspects of human life)".

Assimilation was seen as a process in which "immigrants were incorporated into society through a unique process of adaptation" (Castles et al., 2009, p. 247). Since assimilation, the concept of multiculturalism has gained popularity, which encourages migrants to preserve their cultural identities. Integration was understood as a two-way process that requires adaptation from the migrant, but also from the host society (Castles et al., 2003).

In Romania, there are legislative projects that highlight the importance of maintaining students with learning difficulties in the educational system, as well as the importance of supporting them in the process of their training and development. However, the reality

shows that, often, the two concepts are confused, both in theoretical approaches and in school practice, as well as that integration is difficult to achieve, being hindered by objective and subjective factors.

Structural integration has become a priority in Romania, but in the Romanian schools there is a need for more openness (from individuals, groups, communities, institutions, educational and social agents etc.) and acceptance for the process of social, cultural and identifying integration, because there are still trends and cases of marginalization and segregation, especially in the school space, but also in the social one.

At present, in Romania there are two education systems: the mass education system – consisting of students with learning difficulties and the special education system, in which there are students with disabilities. However, it is found that learning difficulties are confused with disabilities, fact that affects educational and curricular practices. Also, it is detected the existence of the phenomenon of segregation, in the sense that students with learning difficulties are marginalized and are considered a problematic category. In fact, students with learning difficulties need to be supported to manage and overcome them, using appropriate teaching tools.

The term "migration" has been defined by several authors, for instance Sandu (1994) defined migration as "an essential component of development processes. The different forms of this phenomenon are correlated with economic changes, social structure and quality of life. Under certain conditions and certain aspects, migration appears as a reaction to these changes; in turn, that reaction can have effects in the areas of economic life, quality of life and social structure" (p. 9).

In the case of voluntary migration, reintegration can be defined as "a process that enables the returnee to participate again in the social, cultural, economic and political life of his or her country of origin." (Cassarino, 2008, p. 13)

Regarding remigration, the study shows that some cases are known as voluntary return, others as forced remigration. Framing in one situation or another depends on the European context, the needs and the profile of migrant families. Although traumatic factors are definitely a high risk for migrants, there are also beneficial factors reflected in school performance, such as the foreign language that the student speaks

and which gives him self-confidence and a state of constructive independence.

### 3. Research methodology

*The purpose* of this research was to verify whether the elaboration of a program for re-migrant students has valences in the direction of identifying and removing learning difficulties in the Romanian language and literature of students and in the direction of improving their school integration.

The experimental approach aims to verify the following *hypothesis*:

Participation of migrant middle school students in an experimental school integration program, composed from intervention modules focused on identifying and early removal of learning difficulties in Romanian language and literature, will significantly contribute to the development of skills in understanding texts, using vocabulary, using of syntax and will increase the pace of school integration.

*The research variables* are the following:

*Independent variable*:

- Participation of re-migrant middle school students in an experimental school integration program;

*Dependent variables*:

- The level of vocabulary skills development of re-migrant students;
- The level of understanding of a text in Romanian for re-migrant students;
- The level of development of the syntax skills;
- The level of school performance in the Romanian language and literature tests of re-migrant students;
- The pace of school integration of re-migrant students

In our practical-applicative approaches we have used the following complementary:

- *methods of pedagogical research*: psycho-pedagogical experiment, method of systematic observation, method of investigation, method of focus group, method of tests, method of case study, method of analysis of products of students' activity, method of researching school documents;

- *pedagogical research tools*: questionnaire, interview guide, text comprehension test, vocabulary test, syntax test, observation grid, school progress record sheet, scale – Sense of Community Index II.

The research initiated by us targeted two important categories of subjects, directly involved in the educational process: students and teachers. Therefore, the sample of subjects was made up of Romanian language teachers from Bistrița-Năsăud County and middle school students returning from abroad.

- *Teachers of Romanian language and literature* – we selected a number of 180 teachers from Bistrița-Năsăud County, teachers of Romanian Language and Literature at middle school level, who faced such situations and declared themselves willing to participate in a study on this theme.

- *Middle school students, re-migrants* – 124 students from 5<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup> grades, from Bistrița-Năsăud County were selected in the sample. They were included in an experimental program for the prevention and solution of learning difficulties encountered in the Romanian language and literature discipline.

Regarding *the sample of content*, we identified the topics and contents that were included in the experimental program in accordance with the school curriculum in the Romanian Language and Literature discipline. The experimental program developed and implemented by us during the 8 months of the 2018-2019 school year focused on 10 teaching activities. The activities took place systematically, one activity per week.

### 4. Results

*Analysis of the results of the initial test and establishment of the difficulties faced by re-migrant students*

The analysis of the results obtained by the re-migrant middle school students, at the initial testing of the Romanian language and literature discipline allowed us to present the problems they face. Thus, we found the following main difficulties:

- difficulties in understanding a text at first sight;
- reduced vocabulary;
- difficulties in identifying synonyms/antonyms;

- confusions of meanings;
- phonetic confusions;
- difficulties in constructing sentences and phrases;
- difficulties in dividing words into syllables;
- morphological difficulties (non-recognition of speech parts);
- difficulties in interpreting a sequence from the text;
- difficulties in writing a text, with a given theme, not respecting the specific structure;
- spelling and punctuation errors;
- excessive use of foreign words in Romanian language;
- expression difficulties (inadequate expression of ideas).

At the same time, the analysis of the initial test results shows that there is a predominance of problems such as: difficulties in understanding texts, difficulties in identifying synonyms and antonyms, morphological/syntactic difficulties, difficulties in constructing sentences and phrases and the frequency of spelling and punctuation errors. Also, students showed a low level in the assessment of verbal skills (re-migrant students presented a reduced vocabulary and difficulties in understanding the texts in Romanian).

The experimental school integration program was applied, consisting of intervention modules focused on identifying and early removal of learning difficulties in Romanian language and literature, through which we aim to contribute to ensuring school progress and intensifying the pace of integration school. In performing this program, we considered the fact that the reduction of the difficulties specific to the discipline of Romanian language and literature presents a specific process, an aspect that determined us to elaborate it in three phases:

1) *The initial phase* – stage in which the teacher designs the teaching-learning sequences, based on gathered information regarding the specific difficulties of the Romanian language and literature;

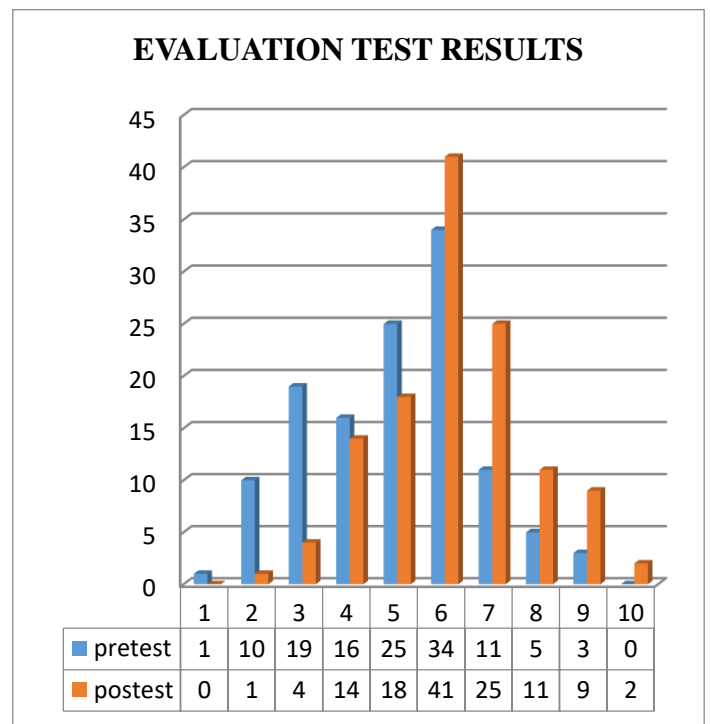
2) *Development phase* – stage in which the teacher puts the student in appropriate situations in relation to the object of learning, with the learning difficulties

they face and at the same time promotes cooperation relations and interactions such as student-student, student-teacher, student-other human sources.

3) *Consolidation phase* – phase in which the teacher analyzes the effects of applying the experimental school integration program.

To observe the changes produced by the participation of re-migrant students in our experimental program, we applied the posttest. We specify that there were no changes in the composition of the sample of subjects.

Figure 1. Grades obtained in the assessment test



In figure no. 1 school progress is observed, by categories of marks obtained in the initial test and in the final test.

There is a significant numerical difference in the categories mark 7 (seven) and mark 8 (eight). Thus, we have the following situation:

- an increase from 11 marks to 25 marks of 7 (seven);
- an increase from 5 marks to 11 marks of 8 (eight);
- an increase from 3 marks to 9 marks of 9 (nine);
- 2 marks out of 10 (ten) were obtained.

### Correlational study

Table no. 1. *The matrix of correlations between the dependent variables vocabulary, syntax, text comprehension, performance in the Romanian language assessment test and school integration of re-migrant middle school students*

Variables included in the study Vocabulary Syntax Comprehension of texts Performance on the assessment test School integration

Variables included in the study	Vocabulary	Syntax	Text Comprehension	Performance evaluation test	School integration
<b>Vocabulary</b>	1	0.637**	0.739**	0.537**	0.150
<b>Syntax</b>	0.637**	1	0.512**	0.246**	0.190*
<b>Text Comprehension</b>	0.739**	0.512**	1	0.553**	0.344**
<b>Performance evaluation test</b>	0.537**	0.246**	0.553**	1	0.170
<b>School integration</b>	0.150	0.190*	0.344**	0.170	1

\*\* . The correlation is significant at the probability level of 0.01.

\*. The correlation is significant at the probability level of 0.05.

There is a significant positive relationship between the vocabulary variable and the syntax variable ( $r = 0.637$ ,  $DF = 122$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

There is a significant positive relationship between the vocabulary variable and the text comprehension variable ( $r = 0.739$ ,  $DF = 122$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

There is a significant positive relationship between the vocabulary variable and the performance variable in the evaluation test ( $r = 0.537$ ,  $DF = 122$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

There is a significant positive relationship between the syntax variable and the text comprehension variable ( $r = 0.512$ ,  $DF = 122$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

There is a significant positive relationship between the syntax variable and the performance variable in the evaluation test ( $r = 0.246$ ,  $DF = 122$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

There is a significant positive relationship between the syntax variable and the performance variable in the evaluation test ( $r = 0.246$ ,  $DF = 122$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

There is a significant positive relationship between the syntax variable and school integration ( $r = 0.190$ ,  $DF = 122$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

There is a significant positive relationship between the text comprehension variable and the school integration variable ( $r = 0.344$ ,  $DF = 122$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

There is a significant positive relationship between the syntax variable and the performance variable in the evaluation test ( $r = 0.246$ ,  $DF = 122$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

There is a significant positive relationship between the text comprehension variable and the performance test variable ( $r = 0.553$ ,  $DF = 122$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

There were no significant correlations between the variables: vocabulary and school integration; performance test and school integration test.

### 5. Conclusions

In conclusion, we stated that the results obtained in the experimental research, in the case studies and in the correlational study confirm the research hypothesis. Thus, the participation of re-migrant middle school students in an experimental school integration program will significantly contribute to the development of skills in understanding texts, using vocabulary, correct use of syntax, ensuring school performance in Romanian language and literature tests and will increase the pace of school integration.

### Authors note:

**Rafila-Elisabeta Ilovan** is currently a teacher at Mihai Eminescu School Năsăud, Bistrița-Năsăud County, Romania and doctoral student at Babeș-Bolyai University. Her fields of research aim to provide students information and support. She is also interested in finding the children's learning needs and giving them all the necessary resources.

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