EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS AN ADEQUATE RESOURCE FOR CONSIDERING ORAL AND WRITTEN EXPRESSION SKILLS

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Abstract

The educational project can be a useful tool in strengthening the skills of oral and written expression when the target group is made up of foreign students attending the courses of the Preparatory Year of the Romanian language as a foreign language. This method of learning and consolidating knowledge can be applied both at the beginning of studies, when the learner is initiated into the secrets of a language, and at the end of them, when oral and written communication skills will already be formed. The present study aims to highlight the importance of the educational project both in the initiation of students into the secrets of the Romanian language, at which point the 60 students grouped in 6 teams will have to draw up lists of the most common words they need both in the academic environment and in the socio-cultural one. The lists will be exchanged between the teams, and at the end of the two months of the project, they will create a dictionary of the foreign student in Romania. In the second semester, the same teams will create, based on the dictionary created as an educational project in the first semester, a guide for adapting to a foreign country for students everywhere. Thus, the study aims to highlight the formative side of educational projects in learning and consolidating knowledge of the Romanian language in the case of foreign students from the Preparatory Year.

Keywords: Dictionary, foreign, knowledge, language, teams.

1. Introduction

Romanian as a foreign language is an increasingly attractive field for research, insufficiently explored, because the target groups that assimilate this idiom are diverse and heterogeneous. The Romanian language does not have the status of an international language, it is spoken only in our country, in the Republic of Moldova, in the former historical provinces belonging today to other countries from a geo-political point of view, as well as in the smaller or larger communities of the Diaspora. Not having the advantage of an international language, the teaching activity is thus much more specific, the didactic approach having to be constantly adapted in order to reach a criterion of efficiency and attractiveness. The foreign student who arrived in Romania to continue his studies is, from the beginning, very motivated to learn this language, but faces, in addition to the inherent culture shock, natural obstacles that sometimes relate to the specifics of an alphabet that is completely different from the one of the country of birth and of the mother tongue. The Preparatory Year of the Romanian language annually brings together students from different continents, with different alphabets, in some cases, with different religions and cultures. Equally, the age and individual characteristics are extremely varied, as well as the learning levels: some want to pursue bachelor's studies, others continue their master's and even doctoral studies, the few of them are undecided, learn Romanian first and then they decide what they will do about their professional, implicitly personal, development.

In order to form the groups, two preliminary questionnaires were administered, namely, the first provided different items regarding the origin (country of origin, continent, religion, specific culture, type of alphabet used, and the second addressed the areas of interest, the important spheres for every student – from a linguistic point of view.

Thus, the six groups made up of 10 students in order to ensure group cohesion are the following: 1. Ukrainian group; 2. Group of Turks 3. Group of Arabs 4. Group of Iranians 5. Group of Albanians 6. Group of Bulgarians. It can be mentioned that there were enough students and different in what they represented to constitute the 6 groups. These could also be formed according to the data provided by the administrative services, but the questionnaires also provided useful, additional information, namely: if they lived only in the country of origin and know only their mother tongue or a foreign language, in most cases English, if they emigrated and lived for a while in another country or even on another continent than their

native one, thus knowing English or the language of that country. Most of the people from the Arab countries lived for a time in Germany or the Nordic countries. The same is the case with Turks or other nationalities, who have the advantage of familiarizing themselves in one way or another, more or less consistently with the Latin alphabet, with a major Romance language or with the Anglo-Saxon ones.

Among the linguistic needs identified through the second questionnaire, the following stood out: those related to everyday life - at shops, at the pharmacy, in the supermarket, at the bus station, those related to administration and authorities - at the immigration office, at bank, police and those related to the academic community - studies - secretariat - international relations office.

In addition, the usefulness of the project as a method of teaching-learning a foreign language should be mentioned, especially through the lens of developing oral and written communication skills and the formation of key skills for the subsequent assimilation of information, for creative text production, for daily interaction with different social categories encountered in Romania. There are some real benefits of such methods especially in terms of learning: efficiency, collaborative learning, critical thinking, distance learning, permanent motivation, easier overcoming of obstacles. Within the groups formed by ethnically, religiously, culturally similar people, it aims, initially, for a limited but optimal social interaction for this moment of learning when the student needs to feel comfortable. Thus, students play various social roles and become capable of implementing them in solving complex tasks in real interaction contexts. Often, the task of the project that falls to each group, but also to each student within the group, confronts the process of acquiring a foreign language with the assimilation of different knowledge and the ability to use this information practically. Initiating a project as an individual educational resource makes the process of assimilating everyone's knowledge unique, specific to the student, intrinsically motivated.

2. Methodology

Once the 6 groups were built and welded, they were assigned tasks, namely, each group had to draw up daily lists, word organizers or even mind maps for each area of interest: daily life, administration/ public authorities and academic life. At the end of each week, the groups exchanged lists/organizers, each filling in the terms they hadn't come across – group 1 will exchange with group 2, group 3 with group 4, group 5 with 6. At the end of the first month each group had to have at least 200 words on their list, without repeating themselves, and at the end of the second month there had to be another 200 terms. Lists/organizers could be letter or word format, using technology where resources exist. Equally, it should be mentioned that in the Romanian language course a padlet was created for each group in which the leader of each group or a volunteer inventory the terms weekly and thus, to be easier to use and not to lose time.

The contexts that the students, the 60, encounter during the first months of accommodation in another country, with another language, are varied, they include both internal factors, brought with them from the country of origin, and external factors, of language acts used daily. Among my frequently encountered words, considered essential in the sphere of everyday life, are those regarding food, clothing, means of transport, names of streets and bus, trolley or tram stops. Regarding the administration/bank/immigration, the most frequent words concern the documents: residence permit, visa, medical certificate, application, declaration, passport, bulletin, personal numerical code, as well as the equivalent of existing structures in Romania and inoperable for foreign citizens. Also, as far as the university environment is concerned, the first and most used terms are: secretariat, cashier, office, student card, certificate, application, lecture hall - blackboard, video projector, markers, sheets, cards, laptop, desk, chairs, flipchart, books, manual, aids, xerox copies. Most of the time, the reality encountered in Romania is totally different from the country of origin, as a result, any detail observed in our country compared to the country of birth attracts the attention and curiosity of students, thus, the species of birds, animals, plants, the color them or the living environment, is an element of interest for the educated. They inventoried every aspect they faced on a daily basis, in everyday interactions, at home, in rent, in the dormitory, in the administration, but also in college. The organizers were initiated in letter format, and later they were techno-edited by computer on those padlets belonging to each group of students. It was found that the linguistic needs are similar, but the specificity and diversity of each group, the exoticism of the country or continent from which they come, led them to retain/note terms related to realities that they did not know and that aroused their interest.

The case study based on the 6 complete lists with common terms, respectively the padlets of the 6 teams that corroborated all the information and presented it in a much more accessible version for everyone, highlights that students acutely feel the need to know some frequently used verbs in the first months in communication such as to be, to have, to want/will, but also others such as to write, read, underline, go up, go down, open, close, have to.

Equally, in the first months, and not only, it is necessary to practice some language acts such as: greeting, addressing directly, presenting, requesting and offering information, expressing thanks and apologies, congratulations, identification, justification, preference, necessity, invitation, desire, order, prohibition, permission, the listed terms being frequently used in these communication situations.

Also, the research reflects the need to know the fundamental cardinal numerals for expressing prices, ordinal numerals, prepositions and essential conjunctions in order to elaborate short statements, but also to be able to understand sometimes even globally the message transmitted by natives in communication.

The second stage of the project involved the development of a guide for the foreign student who arrived in Romania for studies elaborated, in a simplistic way, also by some foreign students, but who, at the end of the second semester, managed to reach the threshold level B1. This stage, in which the members of the 6 teams each made a section of this guide, aims to develop, from their own, creative perspective, a tool for linguistic and cultural survival of foreigners who have arrived in Romania to continue their studies. The project has 6 sections that brings together a conversational structuring of the terms inventoried in the previous stage without any initial criteria, only the frequency of use of the term, the frequency of interaction with it, its impact in communication. They could also associate images, suggestive cultural symbols to the sections and subsections of the guide they created.

3. Results

Regarding the results of this research, they focus on two essential dimensions, namely: I. the linguistic component, of vocabulary and II. the attitudinal, affective component. Thus, from a linguistic point of view, the foreign students inventoried through the 6 lists/padlets the words frequently used in Romanian by a foreign citizen during the first months of verbal and social interaction with those around them, some of the terms constituted their vocabulary active, the other side, considerable, have substantiated the passive vocabulary, they can always recognize the meaning of some terms in context. From an attitudinal, affective point of view, the 6 groups acquired group cohesion, over time, their representatives communicated with each other, supported each other in overcoming obstacles, found creative solutions for all the problems they faced.

The guide designed in the second stage in the form of a portfolio with 6 units: 1. Social conventions – In society 2. Requesting information 3. Providing information 4. Expressing states 5. Determining actions 6. Remedial acts is a useful and creative tool, simple, organized with the help of the teaching staff and effective for heterogeneous groups of future students, because it holds the subjective, but original and personal perception of the students of this academic year on the first months of interaction with native speakers and beyond.

4. Conclusions

To conclude, one can highlight once again the challenges that the process of teaching a foreign language, which is not one of international circulation, entails to foreign citizens who look from different environments from many points of view, heterogeneous, complex groups, through the multitude learning needs and, not only, that they include. The methods used in teaching-learning-evaluation must be stimulating, motivating, accessible, only in this way the learners can optimally acquire the linguistic acquisitions necessary for cultural integration in a foreign country. The project method proves, once again, effective in learning foreign languages, especially if technology is involved with the facilities it entails. The active involvement of the student in the learning process is an effective one, he is responsible for what he knows or what he does not yet know, but he also assumes responsibility for his teammates or for those who, later, will consult the materials, they will have, thus, much easier to overcome some borderline situations.

Students' vocabulary crystallizes over time, communication skills and oral and written expression skills being essential for any foreign language to be assimilated and practiced by certain speakers. Their foundations are established from the beginning, and the awareness of the need for continuous practice through a permanent linguistic immersion is essential.

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