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# ROMANIAN LANGUAGE VIA E-LEARNING PLATFORMS-A CASE STUDY ON L2 ASSESSMENT

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## Abstract

Nowadays, the Internet gives everybody access to knowledge and continuous professional training. The need for continuing education is no longer a novelty. The increase of teaching and learning performance is the main objective of the current educational process and this is achieved by continuously combining traditional teaching, learning and assessment methods with ICT methods. The online assessment of the Romanian language as a foreign language course for adults has highlighted in the last two years the deficient interaction between the teacher/trainer and the adult learner. This means that some clarifications were lacking while assessment was done, that less feedback could be provided on both sides and that the assessment had fewer opportunities for supervised practice. The target feature of online assessment is based on the competences and knowledge achieved in learning Romanian as a foreign language in accordance with Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. In our article, we focus on improving assessment solutions that allows the online teaching and learning content to meet the adult learners needs. Our article provides the most important assessment resources to be used by the teachers/trainers of Romanian as a foreign language with a focus on models, the need of analysis, implementation and assessment stages. Our target result is to describe the process of informing, advising and guiding the teachers/trainers of Romanian as a foreign language to facilitate the integration in an education system of the most suitable online assessment platforms, as well as encouraging training/learning/assessment in a virtual environment.

## 1. Introduction

Romanian language courses have become extremely popular, because more and more foreign language schools and companies offer online foreign language courses for adults. However, despite the popularity of online education, the majority of adults reject such methods, largely generated by the lack of ICT skills/competences. At the same time, despite the growing popularity of online courses, traditional training (in class) is struggling and trying to adopt newer means of maintaining the interest of adult learners. For some individuals, online training is more suitable, while for others face-to-face training is still the preferred method. Adults opt for such courses to increase their qualification level and increase their career opportunities. For example, in order to obtain promotion to a higher level and better paid jobs in Romania, knowledge of the Romanian language is essential. However, many employees may be exhausted after work and do not want to attend regular classes. So, naturally, an online course is much more convenient for them because they save time, money and energy. The best thing about online foreign language courses is that individuals can take a course from the comfort of the office or at home. Even with a busy schedule, one can find a bit of free time for such an online course. In online courses, the adult learner does not interact directly with the teacher/trainer. So, in case one has any questions, it can be difficult to ask the teachers online, because the communication is often very impersonal. However, these courses often offer alternatives like online forums, emails and chat rooms. The use of these alternatives may be useful.

The adult learners often think that interacting with a teacher/trainer is the best way to learn Romanian because it is interactive and allows bidirectional communication. For such adult learners, online courses will be more suitable.

More, adult learners must familiarize with different search engines that represent the main information sources and choose the most suitable and relevant ones. E-learning educational platforms occupy an essential place in modern teaching/learning/assessment methods. On such a platform, the adult learner can manage his/her customized package of courses and/or applications from which he/she wants to learn. Online platforms offer asynchronous or synchronous communication of choice. Offline or "online assessment" (Khan & Khan, 2019, p. 671) or self-assessment is also present. The adult learner may also be presented with lesson modules to make it easier to plan the learning/assessment outcome. There are other features that the adult learner can access and use in learning Romanian as a foreign language so that the learning/assessment process is as easy and efficient as possible.

From all the above mentioned, it follows that the teacher/trainer that works with adults must change his conception and methodology of training, cooperate with them and ensure the quality of the teaching and assessment processes.

## 2. Problem Statement

Proper use of digital resources improves interaction between teacher-adult learner. ICT allows interaction by recording adult learners' audio/video presentations to be evaluated by the teacher/trainer later, exchanging clarifying written messages in chat or instant messaging applications, but also providing clarifications by the teacher. The adult learners are required to have ICT knowledge. In most cases, the

installation of an e-learning system involves the installation of additional applications or environments that require additional technical knowledge. The course space provides a list of tools that allow teachers/trainers of Romanian language as a foreign language to: describe the course; publish materials in any format (text, PDF, HTML, video); develop of learning paths; prepare the online exercises; prepare assessment tests/homework etc. representing the specific means of performing out the distance teaching process, which involves meeting teachers/trainers with the adult learners, mediated by means specific to the platform.

The online assessment of the Romanian language courses as a foreign language for adults has highlighted in the last two years the deficient interaction between the teacher and the adult learner. This may mean that some clarifications were lacking, that less feedback could be provided on both sides and that the assessment, especially the oral one, had fewer opportunities for supervised practice. Like in face-to-face assessment, the target feature of online assessment is to identify adult learners' competences and knowledge in learning Romanian as a foreign language and in accordance with CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages), the international standard for defining language skills. "At the beginning, an explicit approach which focuses directly on establishing the form–meaning link can be most effective, while later, the exposure approach can be most beneficial in enhancing contextual knowledge" (Schmitt, 2008, p. 334). In our article, we focus on the main improvement solutions for teaching/learning/assessment techniques and we make sure that the "learning content" (Muhammad & Srinivasan, 2021, p. 71) and process meets the adult learners needs in order to meet the assessment objectives required. To create effective online assessments tools, we identified some relevant questions we tried to answer to. Our questions helped us have a clear view on why we want to assess the adult learners, which are the challenges of online assessment and the main assessment tools and platforms to be used by teachers/trainers. Our desk research emphasized that there is a great variety of the online platforms that offer both free or paid foreign language courses. The advantages of such platforms are that the learner may be in touch with native speakers, teachers, language experts from all over the world and use the online assessment tools to evaluate the language level achieved.

## 3. Research Questions

Based on the purpose of Romanian language online assessment, we identified three main assessment types to answer our questions:

i.   diagnostic assessment: it is done prior to the instruction (e.g., before a new course/lesson/unit/topic) to identify the initial knowledge, skills, and attitudes of adult learners. The goal is to understand where learners are - intellectually, emotionally or ideologically - to make informed decisions related to the teaching approach;

ii.  ongoing/formative assessment: it is done during the instruction (e.g., a synchronous session, throughout the foreign language course delivery) to identify the ongoing/current knowledge, skills, and attitudes of adult learners. The goal is to get insights into adult learners' ongoing learning progress to make any changes in the teaching approach as required (e.g., provide clarifications, explanations, recommendations to learners, critical feedback);

iii.   summative assessment: it is done at the end of the instruction (e.g., end of a course/lesson/unit/topic) to identify the final knowledge, skills, and attitudes acquired and developed by the adult learners and it represents:

High stakes for all concerned, most obviously for the learners who are being judged but also in the sense that the data may be used to drive course improvement, to assess teaching effectiveness, and for program-level assessments such as accreditation (Kibble, 2017, p. 112).

The goal is to find out whether the learning objectives set at the beginning have been achieved. One can also compare the results of the summative assessment with the results gathered through the diagnostic assessment.

We also considered that the challenges of online assessment should include:

i.   the physical distance between teacher/trainer and adult learner;

ii.   the adaptations of the assessment due to the online context and usage of technology means (Sekendiz, 2018, p. 683);

iii.   the workload, deadlines, and time management;

iv.   the validity: whether the assessment covers the learning objectives set;

v.   the trustworthiness: whether we can trust the results of the assessment (e.g., we have responded to cheat prevention, inclusiveness & accessibility).

The challenges in such an online environment are represented by:

### 3.1. Physical distancing:

i.   break up the assessment into smaller tasks so that the teacher can monitor, intervene, and provide feedback step-by-step throughout the process;

ii.   hold virtual office hours, 1-to-1 meetings, and make yourselves available online, especially in the period before any important assignment;

iii.   use tools to monitor the adult learners' process. One can see the "history" data such as who accessed the material, for how long, and help learners as needed, by increasing the teacher's presence;

iv.   organize synchronous sessions in advance (e.g., web meetings) to discuss with learners the assessment prerequisites, letting them plan their studying.

### 3.2. Assessment adaptations:

i.   use tools in line with the adult learners' assessment objectives

ii.   make sure that adult learners know how to use these tools and access any digital resources

iii.   Workload, deadlines and time management. The teacher/trainer should clearly:

iv.   communicate the expectations, give clear instructions and inform adult learners about the grading method well in advance. Adult learners need to know how to succeed.

The teacher/trainer must include such information in the study guide of the course, which should be available in the platform used. Provide any further explanation and clarifications during the synchronous sessions.

i. use online calendars to notify and keep adult learners updated about the teaching progress and the upcoming assessment.

ii. make sure that he/she has considered the extra time needed for completion of online tasks in terms of technical difficulties (e.g., Internet connectivity, adult learners' familiarization with the tools etc.).

### 3.3. Validity:

i. make sure that the tasks and/or questions are understood and the adult learners know to use the knowledge/skills defined by the learning objectives.

ii. Trustworthiness in assessment. Teachers/trainers should:

iii. incorporate tasks where adult learners are asked to create something innovative rather than recalling information from memory;

iv. do not rely only on one method of assessment. A combination of tasks allows you to draw a bigger picture about learners' performance;

v. hold additional oral discussions with adult learners to clarify whether they indeed completed an individual task on their own;

vi. use plagiarism check tools for written assignments/tasks. Such tools measure the originality of the written work that learners submit electronically;

vii. use proctoring software for the trustworthiness of written exams where adult learners have to answer questions with closed books;

viii. make sure that there are assistive technologies for learners in need of support (e.g., text-to-speech/ speech-to-text recognition, subtitles/live captions, etc.);

ix. ensure the accessibility of the online material.

The teacher/trainer is a user who manages the courses' grouping according to the topics they belong to and administers the content of each course, lesson, assessment, grades the adult learners and manages the completion of the present schedules.

## 4. Purpose of the Study

Our research underlines that COVID-19 pandemic has amplified inequalities between institutions and lacked the opportunity to reformulate the traditional model of school-based learning. "In traditional education, most of the time, language lessons were organized on well-defined themes…. Modern learning focuses on the need to know the fundamental vocabulary words of broad interest that can be used in everyday situations" (Pruneanu, 2019, p. 1987).

In Romania, most institutions used e-learning platforms during the coronavirus (COVID-19) but there is no exact study to emphasize the best e-learning platforms to be used in online assessment. All over the world, "the spread of novel coronavirus COVID-19 has led to profound changes in social interaction and organization, and the education sector has not been immune" (Murphy, 2020, p. 495).

Anytime we search for "online assessment platforms, "digital exams" (Abubakar & Adeshola, 2019, p. 247) the search engines redirect us to online courses only and the confusion is thus created.

Our article purpose is to become familiar with the most used e-learning platforms and tools and to introduce the best online assessment platforms to all those interested in order to evaluate the pedagogical material of users online and to provide recommendations and constructive feedback using online means. The e-learning movement integration from the 20th century "has been operationalized due to the variety of the educational offer by universities, which most have opted to diversify knowledge dissemination means (sounds, images, animations, etc.) to meet the needs of their target public" (Ouadoud et al., 2021, p. 50).

## 5.    Research Methods

E-learning platforms offer an interactive, constructive and constantly integrated environment, focused on learning. The adult learner is part of a small Romanian learning community and is constantly in the position to understand what he/she must do, to explain the next task to the other adult learners, to compete the task and to be part of the everyday assessment. The aim is to facilitate the teachers/trainers of Romanian as a foreign language to properly use their own teaching materials in a proper online environment with the help of suitable tools and platforms, as well as to the best possible pedagogical approaches to deliver their content in the virtual class.

Factors in choosing a method of teaching were: the objective of the lesson, age group of students (for example, while teens are topically oriented, adults are text oriented; abstract thinking is a product of maturity); content of the lesson, available resources; educational background of students (Dina, 2013, p. 1034).

Padlet (Figure 1). Before selecting how the teacher/trainer will actually assess the adult learners, we should think of why learners are assessed. In case of ongoing and summative assessment, the teacher always has to bring up the learning objectives whose achievement he/she wants to measure. What should the adult learners be able to know/do, at what extent and in which conditions? This will guide the teacher to select the most appropriate method like:

Written assignments: adult learners prepare individually or collaboratively and submit a written work online. Assignments are typically used for ongoing assessment of learners' Romanian language knowledge/skills.

Written assessments: these are the typical traditional assessments composed of quizzes (e.g., multiple-choice, short answer questions) or open-ended questions.

Projects: projects can take any format, from recording videos to delivering presentations. This way, they can include one or more of the methods discussed earlier. They mainly focus on the creation of a final "product" (Barr & Johnson, 2021, p. 40). This can be something tangible or more abstract, digital or not, which typically requires innovation and creativity on behalf of the learners. Even though there are specific skills tested and criteria based on which learners will be assessed, we can let them be flexible on how to approach and produce something.

Online surveys: learners complete an assessment survey. These surveys are short and used mainly to track learners' understanding while actively engaging them.

**Figure 1.** Padlet

2. ADDIE (Figure 2) enables the teacher of Romanian as a L2 defines the aims and goals of the e-learning course. It is an acronym stands for Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate. Its main role is knowledge assessment. The teacher/trainer must introduce the exact materials with a focus on levels of Romanian, vocabulary or grammar improvement. In the design phase, the focus is on learning objectives, content, exercise, lesson planning, assessment instruments for the adult learners. The teachers/trainers of Romanian as a foreign language focus on the following:

   i.    types of media to be used: audio and video;

   ii.    the available material resources used by the adult learners to complete a task;

   iii.    type of study, the teacher/trainer chooses collaborative, interactive, or individual;

   iv.    exact time is to be assigned to each task;

   v.    the adult learners' level of language acquisition;

   vi.    teacher's/trainer's feedback and assessment.

It may be used for online discussions: learners engage with synchronous or asynchronous discussion activities. Asynchronous discussions can be done on a discussion board, blog, forum, or wiki. Synchronous discussions can be done via web conferencing. Teachers/Trainers play a role to product and test teaching material methods to be used in each Romanian language lesson, no matter the main topic refers to vocabulary, tenses, etc.. Development thus involves creating and testing of adult learners' learning outcomes. Each course monitoring is mandatory. Proper assessment of the course with necessary and timely revisions is performed each time required. When teachers/trainers of Romanian as a foreign language and adult learners actively contribute, lesson is more effective and successful.

At present, it may be difficult to control the class if it contains many students, so as much as possible asynchronous online classes are divided into smaller groups. Because of this, this may lead to an intensive time commitment for the online teachers (Lim, 2017, p. 232).

ADDIE's target role is that:

   i.    adult learners to become acquainted using it;

   ii.    adult learners to be able to properly plan, devise and implement an online course;

   iii.    adult learners to be able to assess ADDIE use;

iv.      adult learners to make the necessary changes and improvements based on an informed assessment of the model usability.

Considerable work is being done in the last 2 years. This depends on the possibility of identifying the individual profiles of learners. In this study, the adult learner's profile seems to be the following: "Online students who are more satisfied with their learning experience and satisfied with their instructors have been found to have had a greater sense of social presence in the course" (Lyons et al., 2012, p. 182).
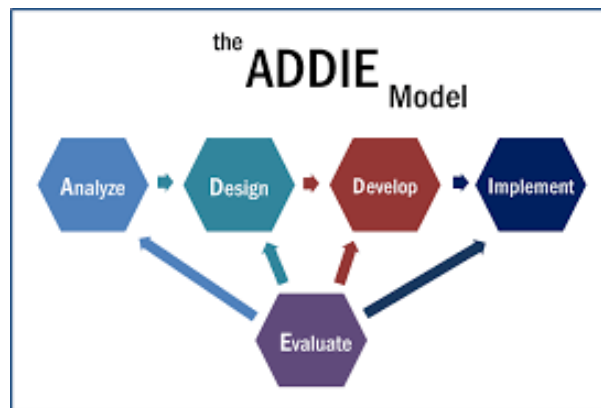


**Figure 2.** ADDIE Model

OBS-Open Broadcaster Software (Figure 3) allows the teachers/trainers of Romanian as a foreign language more flexibility with creating video materials. OBS focuses on video empowerment, mobile content, enrichment of material with multiple elements and last but not least, it can be interactive. The teachers/trainers choose and setup their own streaming provider account then open source content intended for use. In accordance with the course materials, the teacher/trainer creates and names all scenes. The next step is to add a source for each scene and bring them together. The last stage is to start streaming. Among OBS disadvantages, we mention a fast network connection (live streaming), hardware (PC, camera), teachers need a streaming account (some are country specific) and the multiple roles at once (producer, lecturer, mediator).
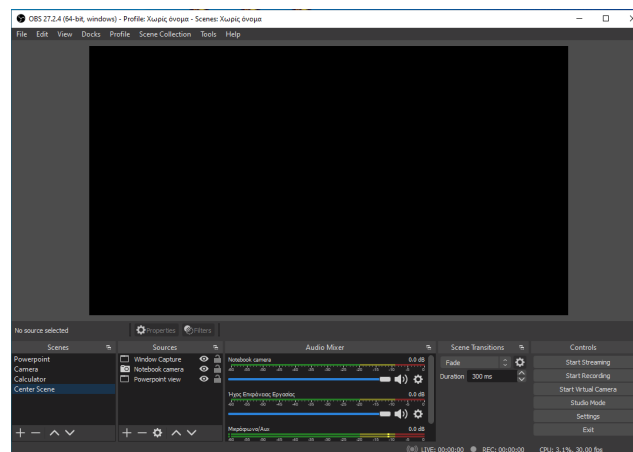


**Figure 3.** Open Broadcaster Software

MENTIMETER (Figure 4) represents one of the best online assessment methods. Along with E-portfolios where each adult learner may prepare an electronic space that gathers all work produced throughout a course (e.g., a research paper, a project, a presentation) and includes them in an online space for anyone interested in accessing them, this tool allows the adult learners to monitor and reflect on their Romanian language progress. Self-assessment can have the format of a quiz, a game-based activity, a checklist, a survey, or a mind map-concept. The evaluation of the Romanian courses through various mechanisms, including through web tools is important to objectively determine the level of quality of the teaching/learning process. This type of evaluation mobilizes the teacher/trainer for better performance, continuous professional development and high sensitivity to trends in society. As a result, the teacher/trainer tends to permanently connect the teaching/learning methodology to the needs of adult learners. Evaluating teaching is a core component of continuous professional development and e-learning is no exception, but must be implemented carefully to be most effective. Planning an evaluation strategy – whether for a single course, a full Romanian language course is a useful first step in ensuring effective evaluation of eLearning. MENTIMETER evaluates teaching and learning for a better study programme improvement and enhances the adult learner learning by identifying the best learning outcomes and improving teacher's/trainer's practice and pedagogical tolls.

As adult learners increasingly use their mobile devices, it can only boost the phenomenon of e-learning, facilitating the expansion of online courses on tablets and smartphones and beyond. Romania, in turn, announces a market for online courses in a vigorous growth, encouraged by companies concerned with the development of Romanian education.



**Figure 4.** Interactive presentation software

An educational platform must meet numerous requirements, the most important of which would be: to use a friendly interface adaptable to the dynamics of the educational process, to use a logical support of synchronous and asynchronous communication, information must be monitored, to provide the possibility of management accessible content of the teaching/learning content, to use educational content editing modules, may record feedback on the quality of the services offered, as well as the quality of the educational platform, etc. Educational platforms used for adult learners are diverse and are used depending on the specifics of the activity carried out, at a certain time.

Using the above elements, you can improve the degree of "authenticity" of all the assessment methods one chooses to follow. Even a multiple choice quiz can include questions that require adult learners to solve a problem using higher order thinking skills than memorization.

## 6.    Findings

Similar to face-to-face instruction, the purpose of giving feedback is to inform adult learners about their performance level and the degree of achievement of concrete competences in learning Romanian as a foreign language. Thus:

1.  the teacher/trainer needs to be present and give feedback that supports learners. Feedback can be provided orally, audiovisual (recording a video) or in written form, via synchronous or asynchronous communication.

2.  one-to-one teacher-learner feedback is the golden rule for quality feedback but it isn't always practical or possible on a regular basis. This is where digital tools come to help. Many tools have a range of feedback options. One can offer feedback for learners who get the answer correct (e.g., positive comment, redirection to another learning source), specific tips for learners who answer incorrectly, and general feedback for all learners. There are also options for custom feedback. For this, we might need to think about learners' potential answers to questions such as what they tend to do wrong. (

3.  peer-to-peer feedback is a common practice in face-to-face environments which can be easily applied in online formats. "Online tools make peer review especially efficient and effective, most notably in allowing for multi-peer feedback" (Cho & Schunn, 2007, p. 426).

4.  Peer feedback is "a process in which students provide comments and suggestions about an assignment or project to one another" (Usher & Barak, 2018, p. 748). A peer feedback process can involve the following:

i.      teachers/trainers communicate the outcomes and expectations for an activity;

ii.     learners give/receive feedback;

iii.    all reflect on the feedback.

5.  the teacher/trainer can provide adult learners with a checklist or rubric including specific criteria to help them reflect on their progress in the form of self-assessment. By circling or checking off a criterion on a rubric, adult learners can see which competencies they have mastered or which proficiencies they have to improve.

## 7.    Conclusions

Our research emphasizes the authentic assessment in learning Romanian as a foreign language using platforms like: Padlet, ADDIE, OBS and MENTIMETER. We consider these online platforms realistic, require higher order thinking skills (e.g., judgement, critical thinking, innovation/creativity), resemble the contexts in which the adult learners will actually use Romanian as the new knowledge, skills, attitudes learned throughout an instruction. They also include "complex" tasks, meaning that they are not solved on the spot or with minimum effort but require multiple skills. The platforms give adult

learners sufficient time and space for reflection and improvement through feedback and allow for collaboration and group work. It is important that the teacher/trainer assists adult learners in terms of how to provide feedback. They should be always given the learners:

i.   specific rules and instructions (be clear about what should they do and not do)
ii.  checklists/rubrics with criteria they can use in this process.  Have adult learners do a self-assessment using the rubric first and guide them throughout by observing their actions to intervene if necessary. Prior to starting the peer review, one can also model the expected behavior.

In adult learners' performance, three skills will be assessed (reading, listening and speaking) and reported, each on a separate scale. Information for improving foreign language teaching and learning will result from the analysis of learners' language learning backgrounds and how their backgrounds relate to their proficiency levels, both at the level of individual students (through information collected in background questionnaires) and at the level of entire education systems. Curricular goals indeed are generally articulated in terms of distinct skills, and differences in adult learners' profiles may be related to differential access to resources. For each skill gained by the adult learner, the teacher/trainer will report results on six-point scales that are aligned with the reference levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). In addition, by using a reference that is already in use for multiple languages around the world, these online platforms lay the foundation to expand the range of language assessed.

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