

**EDU WORLD 2022**

Edu World International Conference Education Facing Contemporary World Issues

**APPROACHES IN TEACHING ROMANIAN LITERATURE FOR  
PEDAGOGY OF PRIMARY AND PRESCHOOL EDUCATION**

Stan Ruxandra Viorela (a)\*

\*Corresponding Author

(a) University of Pitești, 1 Targul din Vale street, Pitești, Argeș, România, ruxxy\_j@yahoo.com

**Abstract**

Literature teaching means to train our students to read, think, analyze and approach literary issues as trained specialists. Each course has specific objectives and we plan our didactic activities to engage students in meeting these objectives. The formal theories of teaching literature can be roughly divided into subject-centered theories, teacher-centered theories and student-centered theories but very few teachers apply a single theory in teaching fiction, poetry or drama. Despite the debates on its content, the syllabus for the students of Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education can be approached in a flexible and creative manner, beneficial for the learning process. The aim of the study is to identify the second and third year of study students' perception about the content, structure and methodological approaches of the Romanian literature course as well as to identify the efficient and less efficient methods used in the classroom activities. The design of the study is a constative one, while the results can contribute to the identification of the essential factors which influence the quality of the educational process in teaching literature. Since the goals of teaching literature are essentially related to civilization, fundamental questions of human existence and human nature it is highly important not only to teach our students literary canons and made them learn a set of reading skills but also to motivate them to become an active part in the learning process in order to be able to pass the craft of reading to their future pupils.

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*Keywords:* Drama, fiction, literature, method, poetry

## 1. Introduction

Literary teaching is widely seen to train our students to read, analyze and approach literary issues as trained specialists. There are a lot of conflicting views upon literary goals offered by teachers which refer to pleasure, education, the power of imagination or philosophical. Certainly, the cognitive skills aimed at by a literature course are: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Showalter, 2006). For the lesson to go well, the teacher must have clearly defined the literary theory notions because they are the basis of text interpretation (Sâmihăian, 2017), but also master traditional and modern teaching methods (Romanescu, 2017).

Moreover, each objective should be followed by assignments and applied activities. As it is usual, we have to provide learning objectives for our course, which should take into consideration its structure and some external factors. The challenges we met are related to the fact that some topics related to the syllabus repeat what pupils have already learned, to the fact that some students have no solid background or there is little time allotted to our course. It is also of utmost importance, that the literary pedagogy should be directed towards “the craft of reading” (Scholes, 2018); if so we need to direct our students towards the learning of specific competences and skills such as: to read metaphorical language, to seek information about the author, content and interpretation, to detect literary models, to detect the cultural assumption of a different time and place, to develop a personal response by understanding the experience expressed through the text, to use literature as a means to broaden one’s own experience, to decode the stream of language (diction, syntax, metaphor and style), to work with others, to defend a critical judgment. In the narrative text study, as in every notion of literature or language, the student's interest must be aroused (Ilie, 2020; Molan, 2018) and effective methods of communication must be used from the preschool education level, in an intelligent and funny way. (Faber et al., 2019) Thus, we need to identify a range of formal theories which would help us to attain our objectives through didactic and communication skills.

## 2. Problem Statement

Literature is an important segment in the curriculums in many educational units.

In a world of change, pedagogy must also reinvent itself, increasingly becoming the teacher's best friend (Beadle, 2020; Pânișoară, 2017). From traditional approaches to poststructuralist ones, scholars and theorists advocated the interpretation and teaching of literature from multiple perspectives. Nevertheless, despite these multiple perspectives (Showalter, 2006) points out that theories of literature teaching can be grouped into three main categories: subject-centred theories, teacher-centred theories and student-centred theories. The subject –centred theories focus on content and information. Sometimes called the transmission theory, it is about the transfer of knowledge from the teacher to the student. Content is taught and imposed by the teacher according to his convictions; also in our case we should follow recommendations in official documents which impose writers of national pride who make the subject of future certification exams. The teacher-centred model uses teacher charisma and abilities can be an integral part in the process of learning. Nobody likes an unintelligible teacher; besides a teacher with speaking skills has a powerful impact on students (Eble, 2018). Student-centred theories have gained a lot

of space during the last decades; the emphasis does not fall on traditional exposure of great works but on active, collaborative learning, when the student confronts the text directly (Showalter, 2006). Also, Wagner (2005), Knapp (2018), Dresang and McClelland (1999) affirmed that the teaching of literature which makes the most sense in the context of twenty first century needs to be student-centred. According to Mc Keachie's (2013):

What is important is learning, not teaching. Teaching effectiveness depends not on what the teacher does, but rather on what the student does. Teaching involves listening as much as talking. It is important that both teachers and students are actively thinking, but most important is what goes on in the students' minds. (p. 6)

Very few teachers appeal to a single theory; eclectic theories are probably the most used in teaching literature. Most teachers will employ whatever theory will be suitable at a given time of the lesson and subject. Knowing about pedagogical theories is important. It is rather essential to know about as many theories as you can so that you are able to move back and forth between them spontaneously in the class.

## **2.1. Teaching prose, drama and poetry**

The specialty literature highlights the differences between teaching the three main literary genres. Prose fiction can be approached in a variety of contexts, the great novels of a particular period or a choice of a single novel representative for an author for the course while in the seminar more novels can be evaluated. Some teachers begin with biography and historical background, then pass to plot, characters, structure, and ideology. An introductory theoretical part proves to be necessary to introduce students to the genres of the novel: Bildungsroman, realism, romanticism, symbolism, dystopia, magical realism and their features. Students can be encouraged to use digital means to find information about the author, to see film adaptations which can enhance their understanding. It is important to promote creative, active, collaborative learning in literature classroom in order to make literary study life-relevant and meaningful to students. Showalter (2006) and Egan (2005) recommend activities such as play, mystery, reading journals and writing response essays.

Teaching drama can also be a paradigm for active learning and the teacher should "bring out what's on the page and help them to set up and provide the performative supplement for themselves" (Showalter, 2006, p. 85). Drama brings play, humour to learning, enhances motivation and verbal and non-verbal communication, can lead to the intellectual and emotional discovery of the text.

Teaching poetry gives any instructor the opportunity to engage students in active learning. Poetry has a diminished status nowadays due to both teachers and students. In order to restore poetry to a more central position in the literary curriculum "we must select from a fuller range of poetic texts and present them in a way that encourages readers to connect the poems to their lives" (Scholes, 2018, p. 75), that is we should start with poets and poems that are meaningful to them. Certainly, every teacher will combine techniques and methods; however, before teaching an individual poet or a single poem, one should have an introductory course on poetic language, metrics, prosody and image. Lecturing a poem brings emotion

and facilitates interpretation. We can start by reading it, then summarize it and then discuss. Memorization can also be an useful pedagogical tool, since mnemonic devices can provide the storage and direct perception of a poem. At the end of the semester students should have writing assignments about their lectures and different types poetic language from classics to modernism.

### 3. Research Questions

The following research question can be formulated especially in relation to our study how do literature fit into the present day curriculum of the Preschool and Primary Education Pedagogy. Do students perceive appropriately literature in the age of media and internet and how can we make them understand the role of Literature in Education. An effective role of such important part of the syllabus to improve students' learning, to encourage their reading skills taking into account that they are the future educators of our children. Assignments as an evaluation method can be really useful or do we need more debates and seminars teaching of literature is closely connected to an active learning,

### 4. Purpose of the Study

Starting from the assumption that the literature is an important part of curriculum, we proposed as objective of the present study to identify the students' perception about the content, structure and methodological approaches of the Romanian literature course with a view to improve classroom activities and to enhance their comprehension and active learning.

### 5. Research Methods

The research had been performed on a fixed sample made up of 80 students from the Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education from Râmnicu Vâlcea, Romania from the 1-st and 2-nd year of study who attended the Romanian literature course. The research (Table 1) was based on a questionnaire elaborated by us, made up of 10 closed and open-ended questions, which referred precisely to students' perception of the course, and methods used in the classroom. We have to mention that the syllabus for The Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education includes Romanian literature only for a semester, other related disciplines are Children literature studied for one semester and an optional course on literature for Primary School Cycle.

**Table 1.** Questionnaire on students' perception about the Romanian literature course

Questionnaire about students' perception of the Romanian literature course	
	What is your perception of literature in the educational curricula?
1.	important very important not important not at all important
	How do you rate your attendance to the Romanian literature course?
2.	very good good poor

	What are the advantages of the course?
	Prepare you for future examinations
3	Make you love literature
	Prepare you for the craft of reading
	Just a discipline in the syllabus
4	What are the weaknesses of the course in length? Please explain
5	What are the weaknesses of the course in content? Please explain
6	What are the weaknesses of the course in structure? Please explain
	What methods are used in the classroom for the course?
	Lecturing
7	Memorization
	collaborative learning
	others
	What methods are used for the seminar?
	Assignments
8	Debates
	Reading
	others
9	Can you mention the main flaw of the course?
10	Can you mention the main strength of the course?

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## 6. Findings

The results obtained after having applied the above-mentioned questionnaire revealed specific information not only about students' perception of literature as a discipline in the educational program but also about the methods used in the classroom in the Romanian literature course. The answers to the first question showed that most students (77,5 %) appreciate that literature is very important, while the rest of the respondents 22,5 % considered it important. What is appreciated is that, at least at a declarative level, they consider that literature as a discipline is very important for the professional and personal training of students.

The second question revealed that students had a high level of attendance at the course and seminars: 67,5 % had a very good attendance, 18,75 a good attendance and only 13,75 had a poor attendance. For the third question the students considered mainly that the literature course is beneficial for future exams (86,25 %) while only a percentage of 51,25 considered that the course implies which eventually make them love of literature; the guidance for the craft of reading obtained a very poor percentage (35%) as compared to the first variant. Nevertheless, none of the students considered that literature is only a discipline in the syllabus. For the fourth question, the respondents (90%) showed that the main weakness of the course is its reduced timeframe (only one semester) for an overview of Romanian literature and also for reading since not everybody has a previous knowledge of the subject. As concerns the sixth question, 77,5% of the respondents showed that the authors in the syllabus are already studied in the high school and would like to study more works from an author, while 12,5% would like a more diverse content, a small percentage (10%) declared themselves satisfied with the content of the course. For the seventh question, all respondents declared that they agree with the thematic approach on genres and species as being more accessible for this type of course than the chronological one. The question referring to the methods used in teaching the course obtained the following results: most respondents showed that lecturing is used in the classroom (73,75 %), collaborative learning (18,75),

while others (reader-based 7,5%) are not used much. For seminar we have collected that assignments have a percentage of 70%, debates 22,5 %, readings a very small percentage (7,5) while film adaptations got a surprising (31,25). As concerns the main weakness of the course, all respondents showed that an introductory theoretical part would help them decode and understand poetry and prose since most students do not have expertise in diction, metaphor or poetic language. For the last question, students responded that the main strength of the course is that it provides a large perspective of the issues not only literary but also historical, psychological and philosophical, enhances a greater understanding of life and human condition and contributes to personal and professional development.

## 7. Conclusions

The results obtained showed that students are all interested in the literature course and consider it very important in the curriculum. They consider that the literature course is more beneficial for future exams than to make them love literature or induce the craft of reading. The main flaws of the course are the lack of an introductory theoretical part important in decoding the texts discussed and in training students to generate new and innovative meaning of the texts and its reduced timeframe which certainly implies challenges in content and structure. Some students feel the need for a more diverse content since most of them have a previous knowledge of the subject. As concerns the methods used in the classroom, the course is based mainly on lecturing and to a small degree to collaborative learning while the seminars use assignments, debates and film adaptations to help students get a complex picture of the works studied. The results obtained suggest that a reorientation of the course towards student-centred teaching, towards learning strategies which promote discussion, telling personal narratives and critical examination of meaning would be beneficial for the achievement of literary goals. Still keeping his central position to students, the teacher can become a facilitator to promote dialogue, investigation and active learning in the class. Since the goals of teaching literature are essentially related to civilization, fundamental questions of human existence and human nature it is highly important not only to teach our students literary canons and made them learn a set of reading skills but also to motivate them to become an active part in the learning process in order to be able to pass the craft of reading to their future pupils.

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