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## Linguistic skills between explicit and implicit in the romanian early education curriculum

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### Abstract

Language constitutes the central core of a child's psychic structure and plays a predominant role in the overall process of personality development. Effective communication through language necessitates the cultivation of four fundamental skills, collectively recognized as linguistic abilities: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The present study is underpinned by the premise that at very early ages, children do not sequentially or discretely acquire these four skills; instead, they evolve almost concurrently. Therefore, the aim of this research was to examine the prevalence of linguistic skills in two official reference documents that provide a unified perspective on the legal and pedagogical framework governing early education in Romania. *The Early Education Curriculum* and the official document *Fundamental Milestones in the Early Learning and Development of Children from Birth to 7 Years* were subjected to analysis using the semantic software Tropes v8.2 (developed by Pierre Molette and Agnès Landré), available in Romanian. Through the extraction of a series of references from the texts and subsequent statistical analysis, the interplay between explicit and implicit elements in the representation of linguistic abilities was brought into focus across all five developmental domains.

**Keywords:** *ability, language, curricula, early education, content analysis.*

### 1. Introduction

The age range from birth to 7 years represents a critical period in laying the foundations for reading, writing, and overall

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literacy development in the years to come. During this relatively short period of time, children undergo a series of fundamental transformations in their learning processes. As educators, we have the responsibility to provide various communication contexts through which preschoolers can express themselves and actively utilize communication means. Interaction with adults and other children significantly impacts their development. This interaction leads to fundamental changes in their mental structure (Anghel, Lupu, 2014).

In the beginning, language primarily expresses the child's basic needs or emotional state, but as they grow, it becomes a tool of thinking. In this context, the importance of language stimulation and linguistic skills development becomes evident. The positive impact we have on young children's lives becomes apparent as they take the next step in their education and life journey, with the communication skills, persistence, and enthusiasm for learning instilled by parents and educators in the early years (Nash et al, 2012).

The official curriculum for kindergartens, the 2019 version, represents an innovative curriculum framework with a strong focus on the holistic development of the child (Anghel, Lazăr, 2019). This curriculum is based on the set of development domains defined in the educational policy document entitled "Fundamental Guidelines for Early Learning and Development of Children from Birth to 7 Years" (RFIDT, 2010). It guides the decisions that teachers need to make in their individual lesson planning process, always with the fundamental objective of supporting the development of preschool children in a comprehensive and coordinated manner, covering cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, physical aspects, and learning competencies.

Because it operates with flexible structures, the two documents, especially the "Curriculum for Early Education" (2019), provide teachers with significant freedom in conceiving, designing, and conducting teaching activities in a way that contributes to the holistic development of the child. In a period of general and particular adaptations and reconfigurations at all levels of education, knowledge and a clear understanding of curricular priorities regarding language are important for managing the pedagogical intention of teachers. Our focus goes beyond merely delineating the formalities of the curriculum. We will also explore the dynamic interplay between

explicit and implicit approaches to language development. As we transition from early childhood (3-4 years) to the later preschool years (5-6 years), we encounter significant variations in the development of linguistic skills. These differences encompass complexities in expressive language, phonetic growth in oral communication, vocabulary expansion, and the progression of grammatical and literary expression.

## **2. The revision of the speciality literature.**

Linguistic skills, as a dimension of communication competence, represent "the capacities necessary to use and understand language correctly and efficiently" (Radford, 2009, p. 4).

For preschoolers, the development of linguistic skills means that they begin to use language to communicate with others, to express their needs, desires, and thoughts (Molan, 2014). These skills manifest in speaking, listening, writing, and reading.

*Speaking* is the process of verbal expression in which the message is formulated, encoded in phonemes, and transmitted to the receiver. In a specific manner, speech involves the phonological structuring of sounds, the clarity with which they are articulated, and the fluency in their production (Voiculescu, 2013). In linguistics, speech has been analyzed in relation to language. Speech encompasses all the physical and mental processes involved in the act of communication, in which one person conveys a concept (thought, idea, or emotion) to another person. In contrast, language represents a set of conventional rules established by a community of language users to ensure mutual understanding. Language can be viewed as a social linguistic resource, whereas speech represents the individual use of this resource (Coșeriu, 2004). According to this view, language provides the framework and resources necessary for speech, while speech implements and concretizes these resources in linguistic interactions.

*Listening* is the verbal process in which one receives and interprets oral discourse to decode and extract the message (Pamfil, 2003). Attentive listening is fundamental for learning and development (Weisleder & Fernald, 2013). Initially, words mean nothing to the child; they are simple sounds. By continually associating them with the same objects or beings, they direct attention

and facilitate cognitive operations: analysis, synthesis, comparison. Meanings are formed based on the child's experience, but over time, they are corrected and refined by society, with vocabulary condensing the millennia of a society's experience.

*Reading* is the ability through which one receives and correctly interprets written texts to extract and understand the information or message. A significant skill for reading development in the preschool period is the ability to segment individual sounds into words, known as phonemic segmentation (Racu, 2010).

*Writing* is the productive ability that expresses information through graphic symbols or letters, so that it can be decoded by the recipient. At the beginning of preschool, a child starts to communicate through drawing, using random lines laden with meaning, experimenting with both drawing lines and using writing tools. Progressing from the "scribbles" period through the "elementary forms" stage. "Discovering the ability to graphically signify an object, the child becomes aware of the value of writing" (Botiș, 2017, p. 29).

### **3. Research methodology**

#### **3.1 Research approach**

The purpose of this study was to examine the Early Education Curriculum and the official document "Fundamental Guidelines in the Learning and Early Development of Children from Birth to 7 Years," currently in force, organized by developmental domains, regarding the importance attributed to linguistic skills. The study sought answers to the following questions:

- Are there explicit references to linguistic skills in the two aforementioned documents?
- Are there implicit references to linguistic skills in the two aforementioned documents?
- What is the most frequently invoked linguistic skill (listening, reading, speaking, and writing) in the domains of early education?

#### **3.2 Method, instrumentation and procedures**

To conduct this study, the content analysis method of the documents was employed.

Due to the substantial volume of data, the use of an electronic resource, specifically Tropes V8.2 software, was considered necessary. The first document analyzed, *Early Education Curriculum*, approved by the Ministry of National Education (OMEN) under no. 4694/02.08.2019, serves as an official guide that establishes the foundations for the development and implementation of preschool programs in the country. To ensure a comprehensive understanding, the analysis also included the second document, *Fundamental Guidelines in the Learning and Early Development of Children from Birth to 7 Years* (RFIDT), approved by OMEN under no. 3851/2010. This supplementary guide provides essential insights for understanding children's development from birth to the age of 7 and is widely used by educators as a reference point in designing activities in early education units.

#### **4. Analysis and interpretation of the research data**

A comprehensive analysis of the documents makes it clear that preschoolers do not experience the four linguistic skills in a sequential or distinct manner. Instead, these skills develop almost concurrently, with their intrinsic interconnectedness making them inseparable. The development of reading and writing skills is an integral part of the formation of speaking and language comprehension abilities.

##### **4.1 Explicit references**

Within *The Language Development, Communication, and the Foundations of Reading and Writing domain*, explicit references are evenly distributed for each linguistic skill (Figure 1). In this context, children are exposed to direct language stimulation, social interactions, and learning experiences aimed at activating and enriching their vocabulary, stimulating an interest in reading, and helping them associate sounds with the corresponding letters.

Curricular requirements prioritize the ability to speak and listen, each with a percentage of 30%. In building the linguistic profile of preschoolers prepared for school, various indicators described in the document "Fundamental Milestones in Early Development and Learning: A Working Tool" are followed. This includes enriching and nuancing vocabulary, forming coherent sentences, enjoying listening

to stories, using dialogue in symbolic play, and narrating events or stories chronologically.

The ability to read and write has been explicitly identified at 20%. Activities in this domain aim to develop specific behaviors concerning children's interaction with books, including stimulating an interest in reading and caring for books, the ability to voluntarily relate passages from their favorite books, exploring the content of books and relating it to images and illustrations. The documents attest that to develop the crucial ability to associate sounds with letters, which is essential for preparing for reading and writing, preschool children need to practice specific behaviors. These include identifying initial and final sounds of words unassisted, dividing words into syllables with guidance, connecting sounds with the corresponding letters and their written form (both in uppercase and lowercase print), as well as associating words with appropriate images.

Throughout the analysis, we observed that within *the Physical Development, Health, and Personal Hygiene domain*, explicit references emphasize the ability to write (38%) and speaking (35%). In the early preschool years, children begin to communicate through drawing, using lines that are laden with meaning. They experiment with both line tracing and the use of writing tools. "By discovering their ability to represent objects graphically, children become aware of the value of writing" (Botiș, 2017, p. 29). The more confidence a preschooler gains in their hand movements, the more precise and skillful their interaction with writing instruments becomes.

The behaviors that children should acquire within the *Social-Emotional Development domain*, as mentioned in the Early Education Curriculum and detailed in the RFIDTC, reveal an emphasis of 40% on speaking, followed by listening (28%), reading (18%), and lastly, the ability to write (14%). Curriculum standards designate speaking as an essential tool for initiating and maintaining conversations, as well as for developing friendships. Through verbal and written expression of emotions, children learn to recognize, name, and understand their causes, which represents an important step in their socio-emotional development. The therapeutic stories mentioned in this domain further enhance the capacity for empathetic listening and taking on the role of others.

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From a curricular perspective, within *the domains of Cognitive Development and Understanding the World*, as well as *Capabilities and Attitudes in Learning*, it is evident that a child's development is a process intrinsically built within the interaction with the surrounding environment. Predominantly, with a percentage of 42% and 38%, the ability to speak is promoted. This facilitates the development of skills such as critical and analytical thinking, the capacity to establish relationships, and problem-solving abilities. Key elements in this subdomain include causality, critical and analytical thinking, as well as problem-solving skills, as these aspects form the foundation for later cognitive development. From birth, a child exhibits a strong predisposition to listen (21%, as well as 38%) and internalize information from the surrounding environment.

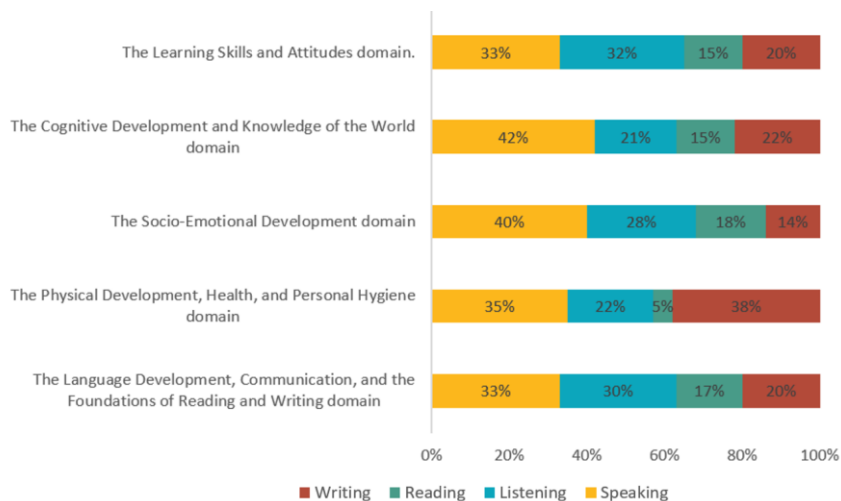


Figure 1 - Implicit references regarding linguistic skills

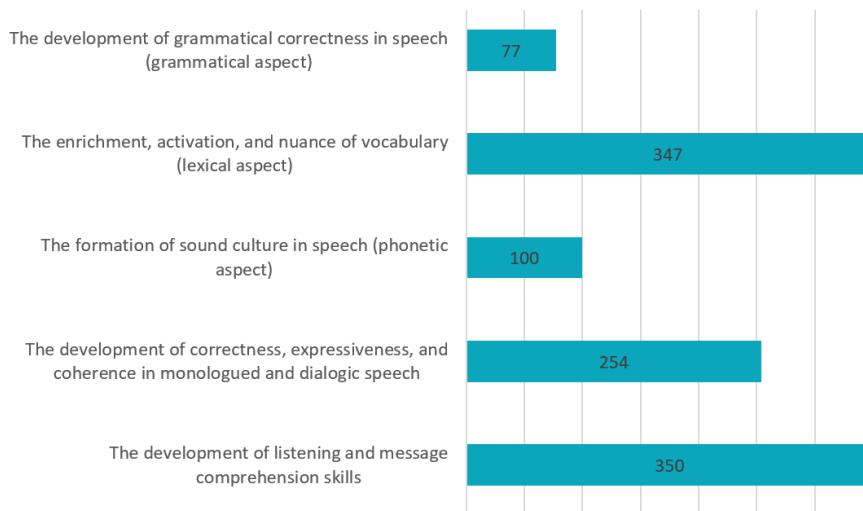
### 4.2. Implicit references

The implicit references, presented in Figure 2, are distributed across five indicators that regulate the directions in the development of preschoolers' linguistic skills: the development of listening and message comprehension skills, the development of correctness, expressiveness, and coherence in monologued and dialogic speech, the formation of sound culture in speech (phonetic aspect), the

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enrichment, activation, and nuance of vocabulary (lexical aspect), and the development of grammatical correctness in speech (grammatical aspect).



**Figure 2 - Explicit references regarding linguistic skills**

With a predetermined logical configuration, characteristic of all normative educational documents, when loading the texts, the main screen displays discourse framing in a descriptive style, with a dynamic, action-oriented posture.

Observations regarding morpho-syntactic aspects reveal several significant aspects regarding language development. It appears that the author focuses on certain common word combinations characterizing linguistic skills: "reading-presumption," "listening-understanding," "book-experience," "writing-sign," "speaking-word." A privileged semantic category is that of active verbs, expressing actions, and reflexive verbs that convey thoughts about the world and feelings.

## Conclusions

The Corpus analysis has highlighted, in addition to specific elements of the preschooler's psycholinguistic profile, which captures the connection and importance in each domain between linguistic



experience and language, the fact that linguistic skills are targeted in various situations and for different purposes. Children can progress along the axis of linguistic skill development not only within the domain of language and communication but also in the context of other domains and daily routines. Traditionally, subjects such as history, geography, science, and mathematics have been viewed as "knowledge subjects" or "non-linguistic subjects" for which language is not considered an integral part of learning, except when learning subject-specific terminology. Currently, many involved factors see this differently. Regardless of the subject, constructing knowledge in an educational context involves working with language.

This analysis answers the three research questions with an optimistic outlook on the opportunities for the formation and development of linguistic skills in early education. Through implicit references, the four linguistic skills transcend the boundaries of the specific language domain and are found in all domains within the preschool curriculum. As mentioned in the official document itself, in the objectives section: "The current curriculum places a strong emphasis on communication, interaction, and dialogue as key factors supporting children's learning and well-being by creating meaningful messages for the child and a sense of belonging to the group" (Curriculum, 2019, p. 4).

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