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Milestones and Competences in Teaching Romanian as a Second Language

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Abstract: Teaching Romanian as a second language (RSL) requires a structured approach that aligns linguistic milestones with key competences. This paper explores the stages of language acquisition in RSL, from basic communication skills to advanced proficiency, highlighting the role of phonetics, grammar, and vocabulary development. It examines the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as a guideline for curriculum design and assessment. Additionally, it identifies essential competences, such as intercultural awareness, pragmatic communication, and language mediation. The paper also discusses effective teaching strategies, including immersive learning, task-based instruction, and digital tools. Special attention is given to the challenges faced by learners with different linguistic backgrounds and the importance of adaptive teaching methods. By analysing best practices and pedagogical innovations, this study provides insights into optimizing RSL instruction, ensuring learners progress efficiently through language milestones while acquiring the necessary competences for real-world communication.

Keywords: Romanian as a Second Language (RSL), competences, strategies, methods, challenges.

1. Introduction

Language is far more than a mere system of words and grammar; it is the bridge connecting individuals, cultures, and worlds. Teaching Romanian as a second language (RSL) opens doors to a rich tapestry of traditions, history, and interpersonal connections, allowing learners not just to communicate but to truly connect with Romania's vibrant cultural identity.

As globalization brings diverse people closer, the demand for effective, thoughtful, and culturally sensitive Romanian language instruction grows steadily.

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Learners approach Romanian not merely to fulfil practical needs but also driven by curiosity, cultural fascination, or the heartfelt desire to integrate more deeply into Romanian society. Thus, successful language instruction involves guiding learners on a clear and engaging journey—from basic communicative skills to advanced linguistic expression and intercultural competence. As observed, "The information we deliver as teachers of a foreign language cannot and must not be restricted to traditional structures of grammar, vocabulary and so on" (Lăpădat and Lăpădat, 2020:139). Therefore, teaching Romanian must go beyond linguistic mechanics, cultivating intercultural connections and dynamic communication abilities.

This paper seeks to outline key milestones in this meaningful journey, using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as a guide. By exploring essential competences such as intercultural awareness, pragmatic communication, and language mediation, and highlighting strategies like immersive experiences, purposeful tasks, and innovative digital tools, educators can better facilitate learners' genuine connection to the Romanian language and culture.

Ultimately, the goal is to empower learners not just with linguistic skills but with the ability to build authentic relationships, navigate cultural landscapes gracefully, and express themselves confidently in Romanian. This paper offers educators insights and practical guidance to support their learners effectively on this inspiring and transformative path.

2. Linguistic Milestones in RSL

Effective teaching of Romanian as a second language involves guiding learners systematically through defined linguistic milestones. These milestones, structured according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), enable educators and learners to clearly identify stages of language acquisition, from initial phonetic awareness to advanced linguistic proficiency. Establishing clear milestones helps maintain learner motivation, ensures consistent progression, and facilitates targeted instructional strategies tailored to specific learner needs at each proficiency level.

Beginner Level (A1–A2)

At the beginner level, learners first focus on fundamental Romanian phonetics and pronunciation, forming the basis for effective communication. Initially, instruction emphasizes recognizing and accurately producing Romanian-specific sounds, such as the distinct vowels (ă, â, î) and consonants that differ from other languages. Learners practice syllable structure, stress placement, and basic intonation patterns through repetitive drills, minimal pair exercises, and guided speaking activities (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

Vocabulary acquisition at this stage involves mastering approximately 500 to 1,000 frequently used words, enabling basic interactions in everyday contexts. This includes introductions, greetings, exchanging personal information, ordering food, and basic transactional language used in shopping or transportation scenarios.

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Learners familiarize themselves with nouns, adjectives, verbs, and basic prepositions required to form simple yet meaningful utterances.

Grammatically, learners at A1–A2 levels are introduced to foundational structures, including present tense verb conjugations, gender and number agreement in nouns and adjectives, basic sentence structure (Subject-Verb-Object), interrogative sentences, and imperative forms. Instruction focuses heavily on communicative competence through interactive dialogues, role-plays, and simple writing exercises. The primary goal is enabling learners to express fundamental needs and participate in basic conversations relevant to everyday life, laying the groundwork for further linguistic development (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Intermediate Level (B1–B2)

Intermediate learners of Romanian progressively encounter greater grammatical complexity and vocabulary expansion, significantly improving their communicative capabilities. At these levels, grammar instruction involves mastering past (imperfect, perfect compus), future, and conditional tenses, thus enabling students to express actions and events across various timeframes clearly and accurately. Moreover, learners explore complex sentence structures involving subordinate clauses, conjunctions, and more nuanced grammatical forms, such as indirect speech and the subjunctive mood (Ellis, 2003).

Vocabulary acquisition becomes broader, typically expanding to around 2,000 to 4,000 words. Intermediate learners tackle vocabulary covering abstract themes, emotions, opinions, societal issues, and professional contexts, substantially increasing their ability to participate in detailed conversations. Through interactive activities such as debates, discussions, and structured interviews, learners practice expressing viewpoints, hypothetical situations, and nuanced descriptions of events or experiences.

At this stage, reading comprehension and writing skills become pivotal. Learners engage with intermediate-level texts, including short stories, news articles, and simplified literature. Writing exercises encourage the production of structured paragraphs and short essays, facilitating coherent expression of ideas, arguments, and narratives. Instruction emphasizes developing clear and precise communication, enabling learners to navigate real-world situations, including workplace interactions and social discussions. Ultimately, the intermediate level equips learners with linguistic tools for competent communication in diverse contexts (Nation, 2013).

Advanced Level (C1–C2)

Advanced learners achieve proficiency characterized by nuanced and sophisticated use of Romanian, enabling effective engagement in academic, professional, and high-level social contexts. Instruction at these levels primarily focuses on refining complex grammatical structures, idiomatic expressions, advanced verb tenses (including nuanced usage of the subjunctive and conditional), passive voice, indirect discourse, and subtle stylistic variations. Learners are expected to demonstrate precision,

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accuracy, and stylistic appropriateness across various registers, from formal academic texts to casual conversations (Krashen, 1982).

Vocabulary mastery expands substantially, typically exceeding 5,000 words, encompassing specialized terminology in academic, professional, and technical domains. Learners engage with authentic texts, such as academic articles, novels, complex literary excerpts, and professional reports, enhancing their reading and analytical skills. Critical analysis and interpretation activities support advanced comprehension and enable students to appreciate linguistic subtleties, cultural references, and thematic nuances inherent in sophisticated texts.

Writing at advanced levels involves creating structured, coherent, and stylistically appropriate essays, reports, and research papers, adhering to high standards of formal writing. Instruction emphasizes clarity, cohesion, logical argumentation, and advanced rhetorical skills. Oral proficiency is further enhanced through presentations, panel discussions, formal debates, and comprehensive interviews. Learners at C1–C2 proficiency can participate confidently in discussions of abstract or specialized topics, express nuanced perspectives, and mediate linguistic and cultural differences with minimal difficulty, representing the culmination of systematic and progressive language instruction (Council of Europe, 2001).

3. The Role of CEFR in Curriculum Design and Assessment

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) plays a crucial role in curriculum design and assessment in teaching Romanian as a second language (RSL). Developed by the Council of Europe, CEFR provides a structured and comprehensive approach to defining language proficiency levels, ranging from basic (A1–A2) through intermediate (B1–B2) to advanced (C1–C2). By clearly articulating expected learner outcomes at each stage, CEFR serves as an invaluable guide for educators and institutions developing RSL curricula, instructional materials, and assessment methods (Council of Europe, 2001).

Curriculum designers utilize CEFR as a foundational framework to structure RSL courses coherently. This alignment ensures that instructional objectives, lesson content, and learning activities are systematically organized around explicit linguistic benchmarks. For instance, beginners (A1–A2) focus primarily on basic communicative tasks and foundational language structures, while intermediate (B1–B2) learners address more complex interactions and texts. At advanced levels (C1–C2), curriculum emphasizes linguistic precision, stylistic nuance, and specialized communication contexts. By aligning curricular goals directly with CEFR standards, RSL educators can accurately gauge learners' progress, maintain consistency across courses, and facilitate smooth transitions from one proficiency level to another.

Assessment methods in RSL instruction also rely significantly on CEFR guidelines. Standardized assessments—such as proficiency tests, oral examinations, and written assignments—are carefully aligned with CEFR descriptors to accurately measure linguistic competence across key skills (listening, reading, writing, and speaking). CEFR-aligned assessments offer clarity to both educators and learners,

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clearly demonstrating areas of strength and identifying specific competencies requiring further attention. Such targeted evaluations help educators refine instructional practices and adjust course content dynamically to address evolving learner needs.

Additionally, the transparency provided by CEFR levels benefits learners by clearly outlining the path to achieving proficiency. Learners can self-assess, establish personal learning goals, and track their progress according to internationally recognized criteria. Furthermore, CEFR facilitates learner mobility and transferability of language qualifications across educational institutions and national borders, enhancing both academic and professional opportunities for RSL learners.

Overall, CEFR's role in curriculum design and assessment ensures rigorous, coherent, and meaningful RSL instruction, effectively supporting learners' linguistic and communicative development.

4. Key Competences in RSL Instruction

Effective Romanian as a second language (RSL) instruction extends beyond linguistic proficiency, requiring learners to acquire essential competences crucial for meaningful and practical communication. These competences include intercultural awareness, pragmatic communication, and language mediation. Each of these components significantly contributes to learners' overall linguistic abilities, enabling successful communication in authentic contexts.

Intercultural awareness involves understanding and effectively navigating cultural differences and similarities encountered during language interactions. Teaching intercultural awareness in RSL instruction helps learners recognize cultural values, norms, behaviours, and attitudes inherent in Romanian society, thus improving their ability to engage sensitively and appropriately within diverse contexts (Byram, 1997). In practice, this involves activities such as comparative cultural analyses, discussions about traditions, holidays, etiquette, and societal norms, enabling learners to explore Romanian culture critically and reflectively.

By integrating cultural elements into language lessons, educators foster learners' abilities to interpret cultural nuances accurately, reducing misunderstandings and increasing communicative effectiveness. Learners who develop strong intercultural competence can better manage interactions with Romanian speakers, appreciate cultural diversity, and adapt flexibly to different communicative situations. Moreover, intercultural awareness supports broader personal development, equipping learners with essential skills for global citizenship and international cooperation, which are increasingly important in contemporary multicultural environments.

Pragmatic communication competence enables learners to understand and effectively employ language within specific contexts and for specific communicative purposes. In RSL instruction, this involves teaching learners to use appropriate language according to social setting, relationship dynamics, communicative intention, and the subtleties of meaning required in everyday and professional interactions (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Pragmatic competence addresses language aspects such

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as politeness forms, indirectness, conversational turn-taking, register shifts, and idiomatic expressions.

Educators employ practical language exercises, role-playing, and situational dialogues to simulate authentic communicative scenarios. Learners practice language variations needed in formal and informal contexts, become skilled at recognizing implicit meanings, and develop strategies for managing social interactions effectively. Developing pragmatic communication skills enhances learners' confidence and fluency in real-world settings, significantly improving interpersonal interactions and professional communication capabilities.

Language mediation competence involves learners' abilities to interpret, translate, and relay meanings effectively between different languages and cultures. This competence is especially relevant in multilingual contexts where learners may act as linguistic and cultural intermediaries. Within RSL instruction, mediation skills are developed through targeted translation and interpretation tasks, encouraging learners to actively engage with texts and spoken interactions, accurately conveying intended meanings and cultural nuances (Council of Europe, 2001).

Teachers integrate mediation-focused activities such as translating short documents, interpreting dialogues, summarizing texts, and mediating discussions between speakers of different languages. These tasks not only strengthen linguistic capabilities but also enhance critical thinking, empathy, and problem-solving abilities. Effective language mediation prepares learners to address real-world communicative demands, facilitating successful interactions in academic, professional, and social contexts. Ultimately, this competence empowers RSL learners to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, promoting clearer communication and greater intercultural understanding.

5. Effective Teaching Strategies

Successful Romanian as a second language (RSL) instruction relies on utilizing effective teaching strategies that engage learners actively and meaningfully. Among the most impactful methodologies are immersive learning, task-based instruction, and digital tools. Each strategy provides unique benefits, supporting learners in different aspects of language acquisition and skill development.

Immersive Learning

Immersive learning represents one of the most effective methods in second-language acquisition, emphasizing authentic, real-world exposure to Romanian. This strategy places learners in environments where Romanian is the primary medium of communication, encouraging continuous language practice in natural contexts. Immersion can be implemented through intensive language courses, language camps, community interaction projects, or study-abroad experiences. These environments foster rapid language acquisition, increase motivation, and significantly enhance listening and speaking skills due to constant exposure to native speakers (Krashen, 1982).

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In classroom settings, immersive techniques might include conducting all instructions and interactions exclusively in Romanian, employing authentic materials such as newspapers, multimedia resources, or engaging learners in role-playing scenarios reflective of real-life situations. By simulating authentic experiences, learners internalize language patterns more naturally, facilitating faster linguistic progression. Immersive learning also promotes cultural immersion, helping learners develop deeper intercultural understanding alongside linguistic proficiency.

Task-Based Instruction

Task-based instruction focuses on language learning through practical, meaningful tasks that require learners to use Romanian actively to accomplish specific communicative goals. Unlike traditional approaches emphasizing isolated grammar and vocabulary, task-based methods prioritize real-world relevance and learner engagement. Typical tasks include everyday activities such as ordering food, planning travel, conducting interviews, or organizing events, requiring learners to apply language structures and vocabulary contextually (Ellis, 2003).

Task-based instruction involves three stages: pre-task, task execution, and post-task evaluation. In the pre-task stage, educators introduce necessary vocabulary and grammar. During task execution, learners actively engage in communication to complete the tasks collaboratively or individually. Finally, the post-task stage involves reflection, correction, and language practice, allowing learners to consolidate language gains. By embedding language instruction in meaningful contexts, task-based teaching enhances communicative competence, critical thinking, collaboration, and learner autonomy, ultimately preparing students effectively for real-world interactions.

Digital Tools

Digital tools significantly enrich RSL instruction, offering dynamic resources to support diverse learner needs and enhance engagement. Technological advancements such as language-learning apps, virtual classrooms, interactive multimedia, and online language platforms provide flexible, personalized learning experiences. These tools allow learners to practice language skills interactively, engage in self-paced learning, and access authentic Romanian content easily (Warschauer & Healey, 1998).

To reinforce this idea, Lăpădat (2023:268) emphasizes that “Mobile-assisted language learning platforms, designed with rich multimedia content and interactive features, tap into these communicative energies,” enhancing engagement and personalizing the learning experience. Similarly, the evolution of educational approaches mirrors what Lăpădat (2022:10) describes in political communication as “an automatic pragmatism of adapting political image strategies to the new technological realities,” drawing attention to the necessity of constant methodological evolution. Digital tools significantly enrich RSL instruction, offering dynamic resources to support diverse learner needs and enhance engagement.

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Educators utilize digital resources to supplement traditional instruction, employing videos, podcasts, interactive quizzes, and digital exercises that reinforce linguistic and communicative skills. Virtual platforms facilitate collaborative learning, enabling learners to engage in group discussions, complete joint projects, and receive instant feedback. Digital tools also allow learners to track progress through automated assessments, helping to personalize learning experiences effectively. Integrating technology into RSL instruction thus increases learner motivation, autonomy, and language proficiency, making the learning process engaging, efficient, and accessible.

6. Challenges and Adaptive Methods

Teaching Romanian as a second language (RSL) presents various challenges, primarily arising from the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of learners. Successfully addressing these challenges necessitates adaptive teaching methods tailored to individual learner needs. Educators must recognize and accommodate differences in learning styles, language interference, pronunciation difficulties, and varying motivation levels among students.

One common challenge faced by RSL learners, particularly those whose first language is significantly different from Romanian, involves pronunciation and phonetic comprehension. Learners from non-Romance language backgrounds, such as speakers of Slavic, Asian, or Arabic languages, often struggle with accurately distinguishing and producing Romanian vowels, consonants, and intonation patterns. Educators can respond to these issues by employing targeted phonetic exercises, minimal pairs practice, and repetition drills designed specifically to address problematic sounds or phonetic patterns. Personalized feedback and corrective modeling help learners refine their pronunciation progressively and effectively (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

Another frequent difficulty is grammatical interference, where learners unintentionally transfer grammatical structures from their native languages into Romanian, resulting in errors and miscommunication. Educators can utilize explicit comparative grammar activities to help learners identify and correct habitual errors by clearly illustrating differences between Romanian and the learners' native languages. Adaptive grammar instruction, featuring personalized corrective exercises and systematic feedback, supports learners in overcoming persistent grammatical challenges, gradually developing correct language use patterns.

Variability in learners' motivation levels and engagement also significantly impacts language acquisition success. Diverse educational backgrounds and language-learning experiences result in varied motivational states among learners. Adaptive methods such as differentiated instruction become crucial in maintaining learner engagement. Differentiated instruction involves tailoring instructional methods, materials, and activities to learners' interests, proficiency levels, and learning preferences. Techniques include varying task complexity, providing

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alternative assignment options, and incorporating authentic, relevant materials into the curriculum to enhance learner motivation and sustained engagement.

Drawing a parallel from legal studies, Lăpădat (2024:121) notices that legal rules are always embedded in a specific cultural matrix, reminding us that language instruction must similarly respect and reflect the intricate cultural context of Romanian, not treat it merely as a transferable set of codes.

Finally, individual learning styles must be carefully considered. Some learners respond better to visual stimuli, while others prefer auditory or kinesthetic activities. Employing a multi-modal instructional approach, incorporating visual aids, interactive digital resources, oral activities, group work, and hands-on tasks, accommodates various learning preferences effectively. Personalized instruction, regular assessment, and continuous monitoring of learners' progress further enhance adaptive teaching effectiveness, allowing educators to adjust their methods dynamically according to individual learner responses and needs.

Overall, adaptive teaching methods addressing pronunciation challenges, grammatical interference, motivational factors, and learning styles significantly enhance RSL instruction. By proactively identifying and accommodating learners' diverse linguistic backgrounds and individual needs, educators facilitate more effective language acquisition, ultimately fostering greater proficiency, confidence, and communicative competence among Romanian language learners.

7. Conclusions

Teaching and learning Romanian as a second language is truly a rewarding journey—one that not only opens linguistic doors but also unlocks vibrant cultural landscapes and meaningful human connections. Throughout this paper, we have explored the structured milestones learners encounter, from foundational pronunciation and vocabulary to sophisticated language skills enabling confident, nuanced communication.

By following clear and established frameworks such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), educators can thoughtfully guide learners along a path marked by clarity, consistency, and achievable goals. Embracing key competences such as intercultural awareness, pragmatic communication, and language mediation empowers learners to engage authentically and sensitively with Romanian culture and society.

Moreover, when educators utilize immersive learning strategies, task-based instruction, and innovative digital tools, they help create engaging, motivating, and effective language learning experiences. Understanding and adapting to the diverse challenges faced by learners, teachers nurture a supportive environment where every learner feels encouraged and valued.

Ultimately, the purpose of teaching Romanian goes beyond grammatical correctness or vocabulary expansion—it is about inspiring learners to confidently express themselves, build friendships, and become active participants in a vibrant, multicultural dialogue. In this endeavor, educators play an essential role, guiding

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learners not merely toward fluency but toward meaningful interactions and lifelong appreciation of Romanian language and culture.

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