Educational Quizz Platforms for Romanian as a Foreign Language: A Case Study of *Kahoot*

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Abstract: The present paper is centred around the educational platform *Kahoot* and the assessment of its use as a teaching and learning aid at the lectures of the Romanian language for foreign students. With the advance of modern technology, teachers (belonging to the generation of *digital migrants*) face the necessity of adapting to the new type of thinking characteristic of the contemporary generation of students (*digital natives*) – the so-called *clip thinking*, which imposes the elaboration of new tools, mechanisms and strategies of teaching. Thus, today's educational system sees the appearance of a great number of new digital products, some of which prove highly useful and even necessary when correctly implemented and exploited in language teaching. One of such resources is *Kahoot* – a quizz platform that can be used by language teachers to both reinforce and assess students' knowledge and skills. The aim of this article is to look at this platform more closely, to analyse its advantages and disadvantages from the viewpoint of modern pedagogy by means of applying the criteria of the assessment of digital curricular products put forward by Constantin Cucoș, and, last but by no means least, to offer recommendations concerning its use in the real practice of teaching Romanian as a foreign language.

Keywords: Kahoot; Romanian as a foreign language; clip thinking; digital tools; educational platforms; preparatory year

1. Introduction

Today's society is marked by rapid and dynamic development – the fact that provokes numerous changes in all spheres of life. One of the catalysers of this progress (or,

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sometimes, regression) is, no doubt, technology (Dejica et al. 2016; Dejica et al. 2020). Digitalization of the contemporary world is the subject largely discussed in the scientific community, whereas the consequences of this process should be analysed and assessed for the sake of a better understanding of the direction which we follow, both in terms of behaviour and cognition.

The deep changes provoked by the assault of technology are also reflected in our educational system. The generation of *digital migrants* has faced that of *digital natives* (Prensky 2001: 1-2). As a result, the former have found themselves in need to adapt not only to new teaching methods and procedures, but also to new types of thinking. *Clip thinking* is a real challenge for today's teachers: fragmentary reception of information, lack of logical links between different facts, heterogenious character of the accumulated data and inability to wholistically perceive the surrounding world (Volkodav 2017: 345; Drozdova, Shuyskaya 2020: 46-47) are some of the typical features of the new type of students, who have been brought up surrounded by multimedia technology which determines not only their interests and inclinations, but also their way of thinking and patterns of interaction with the outside world.

As a reaction to this change of paradygm in our society, the educational system has undertaken several attempts to adapt to the new reality, developing a set of modern techiques and procedures, whose use is becoming more and more necessary in the contemporary society. Computer-based teaching has already proven to be an important element of the educational system, debuting in exact sciences and extrapolating to other domains such as arts (see, for example, Полозов 2002) or letters (see, for example, Braniște, Polozova 2013). On the one hand, a multitude of educational programmes and platforms at the teacher's disposal today represent a major advantage. On the other hand, however, this large number of digital products imposes the necessity of their detailed evaluation with a view to applying them in real teaching contexts.

The present article is aimed at a critical analysis of the educational platform Kahoot (www.kahoot.com). As for the theoretical premises, imperative for such an undertaking, our study will be based on the criteria for the evaluation of a digital curricular product suggested by Constantin Cucoș (2006), and namely relevance, transparency/accessibility, validity, attractivity, flexibility, participation and socialisation. The present analysis will focus on a certain teaching context – that of teaching Romanian as a foreign language by the students enrolled on the preparatory year language course in Romanian universities.

2. Kahoot: a general presentation
Kahoot is a digital curricular platform which constitutes a virtual teaching support, an educational site aimed at active game-based learning. The web-page offers the

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possibility of applying interactive quizzes in real time, during the lesson, as well as outside the classroom; they contain already existing tests on different subjects, including general knowledge. Students access the page and introduce the code of the test, whereas the teacher projects his screen on the blackboard, where the quiz questions are going to appear. As soon as all students have accessed the site, the teacher launches the quiz, and students choose the answer individually or in teams, using their own smartphones or laptops. After each question, as well as at the end of the test, Kahoot presents the top results among the participating students.

2.1. Criterion I. Relevance
This criterion is focused upon the needs and objectives of the user (both teacher and students), especially in reference to the contents and the methodology. This criterion embraces two sub-criteria, and namely:

      a) student-centred character, and

      b) adequacy.

      As for the first criterion, the platform does not take into consideration personal features of students and does not realise any differentiation in the organisation of information. In cases in which the applied tests are accessed by all students during the lesson, the latter have to answer the questions as quickly as possible in order to obtain a better score. Thus, it represents a serious disadvantage for those students who need more time to react and to think in order to take a decision. At the same time, there is a possibility of applying the same test as a home task, without limiting the time in which a student has to give an answer. In these conditions the above-mentioned disadvantage is eliminated, since every student can work at his/her own pace. However, this also means disposing of the competitive side of the quiz – the one which motivates and attracts students.

      As for the second sub-criterion, the platform contains a multitude of quizzes composed by different teachers. Any member of the community can contribute to the creation or improvement of the tests already existing on the web-site. Therefore, the problem that also arises in the case of such products as Wikipedia, based on the collective work of a number of people, who prove to be more or less qualified in the field, deals with the adequacy of the contents. Thus, before applying the test in real practice, the teacher should attentively examine it in order to check its contents from the point of view of its correctness, as well as its adequacy for the university context, the peculiarities of the students' social and cultural background etc.

2.2. Criterion II. Transparency/accessibility
This criterion tackles the facilitation of the access and the use of the educational resource. Its sub-criteria are as follows:

a) clarity of aims;

b) clarity of formulating students' results;

c) clarity of presentation;

d) clarity of methodological principles.

As for the clarity of aims, Kahoot clearly indicates the learning objectives of the contained educational materials. Its quizzes are usually applied for the consolidation of knowledge, after a lesson of knowledge acquisition. The site offers the teacher a possibility to determine whether the test is suitable for his aims or not and to create his/her own test, which would better meet the objectives of the lesson.

The clarity of formulation of students' results is one of the best features of the product. Providing a detailed feedback, showing the number and the rate of correct and wrong answers, as well as the speed with which students delivered them, help both the student and the teacher to become aware of the knowledge acquisition and the progress made in mastering new material – a highly important aspect in teaching Romanian in the framework of the preparatory year course, when the teacher has to constantly ensure complete understanding and correct application of the studied items.

As for the clarity of presentation, we have to mention the fact that the site and the respective mobile application have a clear organisation, whereas tasks and instructions are easy to understand and to perform: the student has to press the button with the colour and the symbol attributed to the chosen answer. The only possible difficulty may consist in a defective formulation of the question that has to be answered – the aspect that the teacher should pay attention to at the stage of the preparation of the test. Thus, if he/she creates his/her own quiz, the question should be formulated in a clear way (concise and precise, having in mind that the time allotted is limited to tens of seconds). In the situation in which the teacher uses an already existing test, he/she should ensure that the questions are clear and to introduce the necessary changes, adapting them to his/her students' needs.

As for the clarity of methodological principles, the respective site provides the teacher with a comprehensive explanation on the creation, application and improvement of quizzes, their aim, as well as the benefits of their use for a better understanding of the students' progress in studying Romanian as a foreign language.

2.3. Criterion III. Validity

This criterion refers to the internal consistency of the contents, as well as the way in which the content is supported by the method and vice versa. Its sub-criteria include:

a) internal coherence;

b) methodological unity;

c) unitary and coherent character of the text;

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d) factual integrity;

e) practicability.

As far as all the above-mentioned sub-criteria are concerned, it can be affirmed that the consistency and the quality of the content vary depending on the test, since the latter are composed by different teachers, with different levels of competence in the sphere of teaching Romanian as a foreign language. As a result, in the case in which the test is applied in the classroom, the teacher should pay special attention to the internal coherence of the test, its factual integrity (especially in the case of the course of the Romanian culture and civilization) and its practicability, along with the selection of questions that should reflect valid methodological principles and be acceptable from the point of view of language and style.

2.4. Criterion IV. Attractiveness

Criterion IV tackles student's motivation – an essential element of the learning process. The respective sub-criteria are:

a) user-friendliness;

b) interactivity;

c) variety;

d) sensitivity.

Attractiveness is the strongest argument in favour of the use of kahoot.com for teaching Romanian as a foreign language. Students are highly motivated, eager to use it for both consolidation and evaluation of their knowledge (in the second case the teacher faces the problem of the students with slow reaction – the reason why we would recommend the evaluation of the students with good results only). This educational resource is highly user-friendly (it is colourful and contains pictures and sounds), ensuring a remarkable degree of interactivity and student participation in the lesson (especially due to its competitive spirit). Students' progress is encouraged (at the end of the quiz they see an imaginary podium with the winners of the competition); at the same time, those who have failed to achieve desired results do not feel discouraged, since they do not see themselves placed at the end of the ranking (this option is, however, available for the teacher in the report compiled after the application of the test in the classroom). Unfortunately, we can hardly talk about the variety of the contents, as the platform is focused exclusively on quiz activities. Therefore, there is hardly any variety concerning types of interaction or variation of working pace. At the same time, we believe that this does not represent a disadvantage for teaching Romanian as a foreign language, taking into consideration the fact that the application of quizzes should not exceed the time limit of 15 minutes, being preceded and followed by other activities, with various types of interaction.

2.5. Criterion V. Flexibility

This criterion deals with the individual ways of approaching the teaching process; its sub-criteria are:

a) individualisation;

b) adaptability.

As for individualisation, it has to be mentioned again that the educational resource in discussion does not take into consideration students' individual features. They all perform the same tasks, being forced to work at the same pace. As a result, even eminent students that achieve remarkable results in other activities may find themselves in unfavourable conditions because of a slower or, on the contrary, hastily reaction. However, the situation can be improved if the teacher applies the quiz as a home task, eliminating the time limit option.

As for the adaptability of its contents, a substantial advantage of the platform consists in the fact that the tests are modifiable by different users. Thus, the teacher has an opportunity to decrease or to increase the degree of difficulty of the questions by extending or reducing the time allotted for the answer, to rephrase questions and options, to erase certain items or to add others.

2.6. Criterion VI. Open/generative character

The sixth criterion refers to the cognitive development and the transfer of knowledge to other, more general contexts. The respective sub-criteria are:

a) transferability;

b) integration;

c) cognitive development.

Turning to the first sub-criterion, we can affirm that the use of kahoot.com contributes to the improvement of the speed of students' reaction. In reference to a narrower sphere of foreign language learning, we also observe the development of an extremely important skill, and namely rapid production of an oral message based on linguistic intuition (as compared to classical exercises, when students recall a rule and try to apply it).

As for the possibility of the integration of the respective quizzes in real teaching practice, this aspect largely depends on the organisation of the educational process. We strongly believe that if tests are selected and applied appropriately by the teacher, they tackle the previously studied information and contribute to the reinforcement of the already acquired knowledge.

As far as cognitive development is concerned, since Kahoot provides one single type of activity, it can hardly offer students the possibility of the analysis of cognitive and training strategies. Thus, this task remains to be performed by the teacher, who should carefully examine his/her students' results and come with some

concrete solutions or corrections dealing with the cognitive aspects of learning Romanian as a foreign language.

2.7. Criterion VII. Participation

This aspect refers to the choices made by students and teachers, as well as their responsibility in the framework of the learning and teaching process. Its sub-criteria are as follows:

a) involvement;

b) personal interest;

c) partnership.

As has already been mentioned in the previous pages, a great advantage of using Kahoot at the lessons of Romanian as a foreign language consists in the active involvement of students in the learning process. Competition – this extremely attractive form of learning – motivates students to actively participate in the suggested activity, whereas the quiz format offers the possibility of participation even for those students whose level of knowledge and language skills is lower (in this case, answers are chosen randomly; however, the student is actively involved in the educational process). Being an additional activity which is meant to accompany other tasks given by the teacher, Kahoot takes into account neither personal interests of students, nor partnership (except from the cases in which the interaction form chosen by the teacher is in pairs or in groups). At the same time, solving quizzes remains a meaningful, important activity, especially for competitive students.

2.8. Criterion VIII. Socialisation

The last criterion of our analysis does not tackle language skills; it deals with:

a) social skills, and

b) intercultural awareness.

In terms of social skills, the teacher may use Kahoot as an opportunity to teach students the rules of participation in a competition largely accepted in the European society – a highly important aspect in the context of teaching Romanian as a foreign language on the preparatory year course, when the aim of the teacher is not only to deliver the skills of the Romanian language, but also cultural skills.

When we speak a language, we assume a certain historical identity that belongs to tradition. Through the act of speaking we strengthen the unity between history and language. (Ciobanu 2018: 43) Otherwise stated, the teacher's target is the student's full integration into the Romanian society. Obviously, intercultural awareness also plays its part here, since the same group of students usually consists of the representatives of different nations, who demonstrate different reactions to tasks and learning contexts.

3. Conclusions

To sum up, the analysis presented in these pages has demonstrated that the Kahoot platform can be used at the lessons of the Romanian as a foreign language on the preparatory year course. It has proven to be a valid and attractive educational resource. However, we would also like to suggest several recommendations for its efficient use:

1. Before applying the quiz at the lesson, it has to be carefully checked by the teacher, especially in the case of the ready-made tests composed by other teacher, with a view to eliminating possible factual errors or inadequate contents.
2. Quizzes should be applied at the lessons of the consolidation and revision type, based on the previously studied information.
3. The time allotted for the respective activity should not exceed 15-20 minutes.
4. Questions and answers contained in the quiz should be short and clear, readable in a short period of time.
5. During the quiz the teacher should ensure a pleasant and friendly atmosphere, preventing possible conflicts in a competitive situation and taking into consideration the intercultural context of the class.
6. At the end of the quiz, students with a high score should be encouraged and motivated, whereas those at the bottom of the ranking should not feel "defeated" in order to avoid their discouragement.
7. After applying a quiz at a lesson, the teacher should analyse the report offered by the platform with great attention, formulating some concrete conclusions concerning students' progress.

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