



Research Article

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Fulfilling language competencies and encouraging critical thinking through the analysis of an Albanian author

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Abstract

In pre-university education in the Republic of Albania, the subject of the Albanian language is developed by students from the first grade of primary education to the last year of upper secondary education. The teaching of the Albanian language is carried out based on the Subject Curricular Guide. According to this guide, the acquisition of the Albanian language is achieved when students achieve several key competencies, which are: listening to various texts; speaking to communicate and learn; reading various literary and non-literary texts; writing for personal and functional purposes; correct use of the language. Proficiency in these competencies means proficiency in the use of the Albanian language. The Ministry of Education approves the Curricular Guide for each subject, as well as the appropriate textbooks for addressing the topics during the lesson. In this part of the paper, the literary text of the Albanian author Kasëm Trebeshina is analyzed to highlight how this text can be widely used as material in fulfilling the fifth linguistic competencies.

Keywords: curriculum, language competencies, literature, critical thinking.

1. Introduction

Among the priorities of the Albanian Ministry of Education Strategy we mention the quality in teaching based on standards comparable to those of European countries, and the professional development of teachers. In the 2nd section of the Strategy, the vision of the education system is highlighted. It includes:

- a teaching system centered on the needs and interests of learners;

- a system where the knowledge of the different domains and the skills built by the learners aim to solve life's problems;
- a system that values cultural and linguistic diversity and technologies;
- a system that encourages lifelong learning.

The school creates conditions and opportunities for the student to build and develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values required by a democratic society to develop independently and holistically, to contribute to the construction and welfare of personal and Albanian society, as well as to confront the challenges of life constructively. The implementation of the curriculum reform based on competencies requires a change in the roles of teachers and schools, as well as expectations of them. Teaching and learning with competencies require teachers capable of facilitating student learning, as well as providing them with appropriate strategies, tools and resources to make learning as effective as possible.

2. Professional development of teachers, a necessity of teaching process

Teaching is the most important profession that influences the formation of the next generation and must be shaped and developed based on standards that define what every teacher should know, what skills they should demonstrate, and what values and attitudes should characterize them. Bossinot (2020) categorizes the competencies that a teacher must master in order to properly perform their profession and achieve the assigned objectives into three main axes: exercising their responsibility within the educational system; exercising their responsibility within the classroom; and exercising their responsibility within the institution.

According to the author, the competency in the first axis consists of acting as a state official in an ethical and responsible manner. The second axis, relating to disciplinary and methodological competencies, is divided into three parts:

- a. Knowing one's discipline: mastering one's subject and having a broad general culture; mastering the language of instruction and communication; engaging in continuous learning and innovation.
- b. Building teaching and learning situations: designing and implementing instruction; assessing students; mastering information and communication technologies (ICT).
- c. Managing the classroom: organizing classroom work; taking into account student diversity.

The third axis relates to interpersonal skills, as it involves working as a team and collaborating with parents and school partners. These three axes represent knowledge, skills, and attitudes, forming the foundation upon which the professionalization of teachers is built.

Regarding the critical training of future language teachers, it must be acknowledged that all undergraduate programs aim to train teachers who, beyond pedagogical and didactic knowledge, are political actors and agents of social transformation. However, there is still progress to be made in ensuring that the teachers we train can adapt teaching and learning theories—often imported from other countries—to the

specificities of Albanian educational and social context, both for foreign language learning and for the general education of students. For example, the curriculum of master's program in teaching Albanian language and literature aims the preparation of specialist teachers of Albanian language and literature in teaching, learning, assessment, preparation of oral and written communication skills. The program undertakes to increase the ability of students to think objectively and critically, to encourage the intellect and stimulate the desire for knowledge, to increase the ability to identify, receive, organize, interpret, evaluate and create on the basis of data valuable products for teaching, learning, to develop effective oral and written communication skills. The program aims to prepare teachers capable of working in education, in the public and private sectors by responding to today's school requirements. In accordance with the standard "Professional and personal development of the teacher" (ASCAP 2020), a quality teacher is in continuous improvement, thanks to reflection on his daily experience, the experiences of his colleagues and the study of professional literature. Teaching Albanian language and literature at school supports the building and development of competencies in other curriculum areas/subjects. Studies conducted within the program have shown that our trainee and graduate students struggle to assume the social role of a teacher; this is evident in their low participation in public competitions to become teachers in public schools and high schools. This is a shortcoming that must be addressed, as teachers serve as positive role models for young people. In this regard, Weber (2007) emphasizes the urgent need to strengthen reflective practice in the initial training of teachers. Regarding the development of language communication skills, the CEFR (2001) presents another innovative proposal, as its various components—production, reception, interaction, and mediation—are learned separately. Certainly, this new structure requires changes in teaching and training practices, such as the distinction between comprehension and production. Nevertheless, it promotes a more flexible approach that is more attuned to learners' expectations, difficulties, and motivations. This approach has the advantage of refocusing learning on students' needs. As a summary, the proposals regarding competencies in the Framework have both theoretical and methodological implications. At the theoretical level, the learner/user has the status of a social actor. They learn the foreign language by interacting with others to "carry out tasks that are not solely linguistic in specific circumstances and environments, within a particular field of action" (CEFR 2001). The teacher, in face-to-face learning contexts, continues to contribute to the development of language communication. However, their role is also redefined, as they participate in the design and implementation of action-oriented learning strategies. With the adoption of the competency-based approach, the Albanian school system is discovering new concepts and tools: project-based pedagogy, inductive methods, integration of formative assessment into learning, the use of ICT in education, etc. Focusing on the learner allows them to consciously construct their knowledge and skills through an approach based on observation, analysis, interaction, and evaluation.

Innovation in curriculum design, the development of new textbooks, and modern pedagogical practices cannot yield positive results in schools without the training of the human resources involved in teaching and learning—namely, teacher trainers and educators. Thus, the ambition of this reform is a true didactic, pedagogical, and technological revolution, particularly in light of the accumulated delays in teaching methods and practices.

3. Encouraging critical thinking and fulfilling language competencies through the literary treatment of an Albanian author

Competence allows us to act/or solve problems satisfactorily in a particular context by mobilizing different capacities in an intergrated manner (Caspar&Carré, 2004). Focusing on the learner is a practice that allows teachers to consciously construct student's knowledge and skills through an approach based on observation, analysis, interaction, and evaluation. Keeping these points in mind, we have chosen to take as an example how the treatment of a particular author has the right potential to develop in the student all the necessary competencies for learning a language. Here we refer to how can teacher master the building of teaching and learning situations. After World War II, Albanian literature fell into the trap of socialist realism, leading to the development of a committed literature, placed at the service of the totalitarian regime. As history knows, many writers had the misfortune of being persecuted and punished by this regime for disagreeing with the new reality that had invaded Albanian society and for stating unacceptable truths. Kasëm Trebeshina was one of these writers who wrote in a period of censorship with his free pen. He can very well be called the "ungrateful author". He was recognized for his dissidence and was not recognized for his voluminous work, which suffered the same fate as its author. After the exit from the communist regime, authors who were once censored by the government bodies began to be treated in school textbooks. Kasëm Trebeshina was one of them and passages from his work "The Village on Seven Hills" began to be studied in basic education. Trebeshina's literature carries great values and we can say that it is a functional literature. We find the meaning of this definition in the diverse spaces of use that his literary work offers us for the realization of the competencies of the field.

4. The competence of listening to different texts

One of the language competences is the competence of listening to different texts and which consist of promoting the ability to understand and analyze listening texts of different typologies. Students acquire knowledge, develop attitudes and values, and apply skills and abilities by listening to written, spoken and media texts. They distinguish several qualities of the speaker's voice such as: intonation, rhythm, emphasis, volume of voice. Also, students retell, isolate the main idea, distinguish key words or phrases, make conclusions, compare or classify, and make simple

assessments of the texts they listen to (Ministry of Education, 2020). Kasëm Trebeshina created it in a difficult time period for the Albanian population, but which still arouses curiosity and is studied in all its administrative, literary, social and cultural aspects. Trebeshina has conducted numerous interviews in which he has presented interesting facts about the period of his creativity. These interviews can be used as a good source of information to promote careful listening among basic education students. This is a process that feeds the curiosity of young people who have very little knowledge about the years of dictatorship. In the anticipated treatment of these topics, students can listen to an interview with the author during class, which can be easily found in online newspapers that deal with literary issues. This process is important because it encourages attentive listening by students. In the continuation of the class, to test attentive listening to the interview, the Albanian language teacher asks questions about the topic being addressed, the thoughts and opinions expressed by the author regarding the topic. Students are free to defend or oppose the author's opinion. A very important interview of the author Kasëm Trebeshina is the interview entitled "Trebeshina." In Albania, the first writer is appointed by state decree, interviewed by journalist Irhan Jubica. This interview addresses the issues of the author's unpublished work during the dictatorship and, surprisingly, also of its unpublished work during the years of democracy.

5. Speaking competence for communication and learning

The competence of speaking for communication aims to enable students to articulate as clearly and completely as possible the opinions, arguments and counterarguments that they may have regarding the issues of the topic addressed in the lesson. We mentioned the period of Kasëm Trebeshina's creativity as a period that arouses curiosity in young people who do not have sufficient information due to living in the years of democracy. These empty spaces can be filled with the stories of their grandparents, from information in newspapers, history books, various documentaries as well as the literature of that period. In function of this goal, speaking to communicate and to learn can be encouraged through topics that address freedom of speech in the years 1950-1990. This topic would be treated as a follow-up topic, after the analysis of one of the texts by the author Kasëm Trebeshina, to better know the author's world and consequently understand the world of his work, since Kasëm Trebeshina is one of the cases of authors where through his life we can better understand the work he has created. Freedom of speech could be presented as a teaching topic in the Discussion in Albanian language textbooks section, developing situations during the lesson based on texts written under state censorship. Students could express their opinion on the surreal situations experienced by the population in that period of time. They could also answer some questions such as: What are the characteristics of a dictatorship state? How do they judge life in a state where free speech in society and the media is censored? How would they present a television show from that period? Are they aware of whether there are still countries in the world that are under dictatorial

regimes? If the students do not have information, the teacher can give some examples of communist countries. An interesting exercise that could accompany the treatment of this topic would be for the students to express how they would feel in a situation where they would not be able to express what they really thought.

6. Competence in reading various literary and non-literary texts

The competence of reading various literary and non-literary texts coincides with the development of the ability to read attentively. They complement the skills of mastering a language by its speakers. This is the competence that is most closely related to the written text. The main motive why writers write is for their creation to reach the reader. We cannot yet draw conclusions about what good literature is or is not, but hypotheses are made that good literature is that which makes you think, which raises questions that require further answers which it is said that only the writer can answer, but of course it is a laborious effort on the part of the reader as well. Students read literary and non-literary texts belonging to different periods, classical and contemporary, Albanian and world texts and demonstrate the meaning, interpretation, analysis, evaluation and judgment of these texts (Ministry of Education, 2020). Trebeshina's text is diverse. In his text, the reader can find philosophical reflections, superficial thoughts and profound thoughts. By analyzing this author, we understand that the opportunity to promote reading competence is great. Trebeshina has produced all types of literature: drama, poetry and prose. The possibility of selecting from his work is great and valuable. If we select Trebeshina's prose to analyze in the Reading section of school textbooks, then students will have the opportunity to read a special text from the literature previously treated. This author's text is composed of diverse nouns with a considerable level of difficulty in pronouncing, thus helping students' articulation during reading. Students also practice how to give intonation to a sentence, since in Kasëm Trebeshinë's work it becomes clear to the reader through the types of sentences the author uses, which are identified through punctuation marks (Memushaj, 2015). Trebeshinë's work is loaded with demonstrative-exclamatory sentences and interrogative-exclamatory sentences. It is precisely these sentences that give us the general panorama of Trebeshinë's creative scene. In the works we have studied, the large number of these sentences is noticeable. This is a way of expressing the general turmoil, the permanent state of alarm and discomfort. Tension prevails everywhere. The characters are in a perpetual, perplexing movement and from moment to moment the unexpected can happen. They are confused by doubts and their freedom of action turns into a nightmare. Trebeshina's text can be called an exercise for the speaking apparatus with the surprises that it serves us during reading. Rhythm is another interesting aspect to study in Trebeshina's work. But how does he achieve the rhythm of the work? In the author's pen, punctuation takes on an important function for the fluidity of situations. Trebeshina's works note the extensive use of reticence (multiple periods) (Albanian Academy of Sciences, 2002). This use is not limited to sentences, periods or

specific words, but is present throughout the length of the text. More present in “The Skeleton Merchant” and less so in other works, reticence slows down the pace and creates space for interpretation.

The indiscriminate use of this punctuation mark, which is otherwise interpreted as “silence”, can also be justified by the circumstances of the writing of the work. Reticence is not only a means of slowing down the “mental articulation” of the phrase. It is a reflection of the lack of freedom of expression. It represents the reluctance to express one’s thoughts and is a gateway to engaging the recipient in an active reading. In Trebeshina’s work, especially in the novel “The Skeleton Merchant”, despite the opposite gender to the drama, the author uses the interjection and the exclamation frequently. This is a poetic explosion of feelings, which serves to make the words more touching and to create the idea of a theatrical scene where the characters act. Life has become a theater. The exclamation accompanied by the interjection is a characteristic linguistic device for dramatic texts. Despite the life drama they experience, our characters see the interjection and the exclamation as a means of revolt and emotional frustration towards the absurdity that surrounds them. In Trebeshina, the exclamation is expressed with simple extended components. At the same time, reading is accompanied by exercises for understanding the literary text, allowing students to make their own interpretation of the subject, characters, environment and interactions.

7. Competence of writing for personal and functional purposes

Competence of writing for personal and functional purposes helps students write for different purposes and audiences. They follow steps during writing such as: planning, organizing ideas, revising and editing. Students also respect the structure, features of the text, as well as language rules (Ministry of Education, 2020). They express their ideas in written form. They put their thoughts and opinions on paper, they are able to create different types of texts. Through this competence, students are able to argue, describe, persuade, narrate, compare, create in prose, dramatize a text and create a poem. The structure that students must follow to create these writings is taken from literary and non-literary texts. So, based on these types of texts, students are trained to create in accordance with the learned and treated models. In this paper, as a model for promoting the ability to write a literary text, we have relied on the text of the author Kasëm Trebeshina. How can Trebeshina’s text promote creativity or critical thinking in students? The topics that Kasëm Trebeshina addresses are a good source of inspiration for creation. Some topics that he addresses in his works, in addition to living in a totalitarian state, are: childhood games; the child’s confrontation with immorality, power and the tragedy of death; the loss of love. Students can write an imaginary interview based on the author’s interviews. They can build an argumentative essay based on the author’s ideas on freedom of speech. Students can turn a fragment from Trebeshina’s prose into a dramatic text. As part of the creation of a descriptive text, they can describe one of Trebeshina’s

characters according to their imagination, starting from the actions and words that the characters say. The most fundamental theme addressed by Kasëm Trebeshina is surviving in a country where freedom of speech is lacking and censorship is the way of life for people. This theme is a very good source of inspiration and ideas to encourage critical thinking among basic education students. Some questions that the teacher can direct and that can serve as titles for argumentative writings created by students are: Would you risk writing and expressing your opinion knowing that you could risk your life? Why?; Do you think that today we are completely free to express our opinions? Does censorship affect the way people live their lives in the future for a long time?; How can the creation of a totalitarian state be avoided? The teacher gives students space to write their opinions and defend them.

8. Correct use of language

The competence of correct use of language focuses on the possession of knowledge, demonstration of skills, values and attitudes regarding the linguistic system of the Albanian language and foreign languages. Thus, students know the different parts of speech, their grammatical categories and use them in the correct form during communication; know the different types of sentences and the functions of words in sentences and apply this knowledge in everyday communication; use the standard language, know dialects and other parts of the lexicon and respect linguistic diversity; have knowledge of the ways of forming words in the Albanian language, distinguish the meanings of words and use them to enrich their vocabulary. Also, students become aware of the richness and expressive values of the language. respecting linguistic rules when using the Albanian language (Ministry of Education, 2020). The Trebeshina text is rich in linguistic terms. The Trebeshina text can be used to identify:

- Different types of sentences (interrogative sentences):

Affirmative interrogative sentences which serve not to ask, but to answer in the affirmative way to a previous question (Çeliku, 2012). E.g.: "Who else should I deal with?!...Why should we bother?!...What else could they do?!..." "But what can you do?!..." "How do you remember, I don't know where you're going?!" ... (Buzuku, 2016). Negative interrogative sentences that serve to deny what is being asked about in a preceding interrogative sentence. E.g.: "Wasn't I there?! Don't I want to tell you?!... Can there be a single person in the world who doesn't know where Oderras falls?!... Don't I want to?!...But don't you remember that I have?!..." (Buzuku, 2016).

In the Albanian language, the sentence parts are placed in a specific order. Despite the fact that they can change their place without transforming the meaning of the sentence, its parts also have an order that in the analysis of various texts is called the neuter model. The neuter model is the model: subject + predicate + object + adjunct. This is also called the simple and progressive order, that derives from the known to the unknown (Lloshi, 1999).

9. Conclusion

The training of teachers to select and produce didactic materials in function of the module objectives and in accordance with the needs of the students is one of the goals of the new teacher training programs. Based on this objective, we suggest periodic training for teachers and at the same time propose a didactics for teaching the Albanian language and literature to encourage critical thinking and the formation of competencies in the field.

Trebesina's literature carries great values and we can say that it is a functional literature. We find the meaning of this definition in the diverse spaces of use that his literary work offers us for the realization of the competencies of the field. Trebesina has conducted numerous interviews in which he has presented interesting facts about the period of his creativity. These interviews can be used as a good source of information to encourage careful listening of basic education students. This process feeds the curiosity of young people who have very little knowledge about the years of dictatorship. In the anticipated analysis of these topics, students during class can listen to an interview with the author, which can be easily found in online newspapers that deal with literary issues. This process is important because it encourages attentive listening on the part of students.

In function of this goal, speaking to communicate and to learn can be encouraged through topics that deal with freedom of speech in the years 1950-1990. Trebesina's text is diverse. In his text, the reader can find philosophical reflections, superficial and deep thoughts. The topics that Kasëm Trebesina addresses are a good source of inspiration for creating. Some of the themes he addresses in his works, besides living in a totalitarian state, are: childhood games; the child's confrontation with immorality, power and the tragedy of death; the loss of love. Students can write an imaginary interview based on the author's interviews. They can build an argumentative essay based on the author's ideas on freedom of speech. Students can turn a fragment from Trebesina's prose into a dramatic text. As part of the creation of a descriptive text, they can describe one of Trebesina's characters according to their imagination, based on actions and words that the characters say.

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