



Zorica V. Cvetanović¹, Ivana P. Stojkov

University of Belgrade, Teacher Education Faculty, Belgrade, Serbia

Ljiljana J. Kelemen Milojević

Preschool Teacher Training College “Mihailo Palov”, Vršac, Serbia

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The Concept of the Textbooks for Learning the Latin Alphabet Prescribed in the Curriculum

Extended summary

Pupils in the Republic of Serbia learn two alphabets, Cyrillic Alphabet in the first grade of primary school and Latin Alphabet in the second grade. This is proscribed in official documents, the *Curriculum for the first grade of elementary education* (Educational Gazette, 2017) and the *Curriculum for the second grade of elementary education* (Educational Gazette, 2018). When learning the Latin alphabet, pupils rely on the skills and knowledge acquired when being taught the Cyrillic alphabet, and particular attention is given to identifying the differences and similarities between the two alphabets. Cyrillic alphabet is taught by using a primer, while a special textbook, usually called *Latinica*, is used for teaching and learning the Latin alphabet. The concept of the latter textbook depends on the content for learning how to read and write, reading tasks, copying, and texts for reading comprehension.

The goal of this paper is to analyze the content for the Latin alphabet learning in the current *Curriculum* and in the accredited textbooks. In the paper, we first analyze the *Curriculum* (2018), i.e., the outcomes, content, and instructions for learning the Latin alphabet. The conclusion regarding the current programmatic framework is that it offers very limited guidelines for learning the second alphabet because it contains only the basic guidelines, a time-frame, and basic content to support learning: words, sentences, dictations, shorter texts. On the other hand, the *Curriculum* does not set any significant methodological foundation, such as methods and approaches for learning letters. For this reason, the textbook concepts may be completely different.

¹ zorica.cvetanovic@ufbg.ac.rs

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Methodological analysis of textbooks is focused on the scope of the textbooks, namely the number of titles/lessons and the functionality of the content for learning block and cursive letters respectively. The research sample consists of eight approved textbooks for learning Latin alphabet from the Textbook Catalogue (Official Gazette of RS, 2020).

The results of the research indicate that textbooks for learning Latin alphabet have similarities, but also great differences in concepts. The similarities in the concepts are as follows: group processing of letters, and learning first block letters and then cursive letters. The differences are noticeable first in the number of titles/lessons which indicate the number of letters in one group and the content for consolidating and improving reading and writing. The number of titles ranges from a minimum of 31 to a maximum of 51, which numerically shows the difference among the analyzed school books. Based on the analysis of the textbooks, it can be concluded that there is a large gap between the total number of lessons provided for learning the Latin alphabet and that these school books differ in the number of titles and thus in concepts.

The analyzed textbooks differ in the scope, number, and levels of tasks, as well as additional content for learning block letters. Thus, the three analyzed textbooks do not have initial contents for learning, four textbooks start with Latin alphabet contents, and in one the Cyrillic text is the starting point. The minimum number of tasks within one lesson is 2, and the maximum number of tasks goes up to 9, in two textbooks. What is common to all analyzed textbooks is the existence of texts and questions for reading comprehension.

The research findings of the textbooks related to all contents written in cursive Latin alphabet letters show that there is a big difference among the analyzed textbooks. The contents are presented in four categories: syllables/pairs of letters, words, sentences, and texts used as models for handwriting. The biggest difference was found in the number of handwritten words, sentences, and texts. Thus, the range of words for learning cursive letters in textbooks ranges from 9 in one book to 279 in another analyzed textbook, whereas the number of handwritten sentences ranges from 1 to 55. In one analyzed textbook we found no handwritten texts, while in another there were 21 such texts. Therefore, the textbooks for learning Latin alphabet differ greatly in the number of contents written in cursive letters and they are used for learning these letters.

This research has shown that there are only basic guidelines for learning the second alphabet in the curricula, and that this has also contributed to huge conceptual differences among the textbooks. Although there is no prescribed number of the groups of letters for learning, nor the amount of the content and tasks necessary or sufficient for learning Latin alphabet, based on the analyzed textbooks it can be concluded that there is a wide range of the total number of titles and the contents for learning block and cursive letters. In some further research, it is possible to compare the orthographic standard with the graphemes in textbooks for learning Latin alphabet, and the following can be analyzed in detail: tasks -- types and formulations, types of texts, and additional content.

Keywords: the Latin alphabet, textbooks for learning the Latin alphabet, curriculum, outcomes of learning the Latin alphabet, learning of reading and writing

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