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Original  
scientific paper

## ***Teaching and Acquiring Reading Literacy in Lower Elementary School Grades in Montenegro***

Paper received: Jun 4 2017  
Paper accepted: Aug 24 2017  
Article Published: Sep 29 2017

### **Extended summary**

The goal of the research was to examine teachers' opinions regarding the realization of learning to read and learning by reading in elementary schools in Montenegro.

Theoretical part of the research included providing definitions of the following concepts: reading, reading literacy, teaching reading, learning to read, and learning by reading. As initial literacy is an introduction to the development of reading competences, the following factors are crucial for its successful instruction and learning: phonological awareness, grapho-phonemic skills and reading fluency. The purpose of the initial reading and writing instruction is to enable pupils to master the skills of reading and understanding the text. This process is influenced by many factors and involves numerous strategies. The development of pupils' vocabulary and early introduction of reading strategies, which encourage pupils' involvement in the reading process, are among the most important elements. After the children have learnt to read fluently and with understanding, this skill is transformed from learning to read into learning by reading. Learning by reading is linked to reading literacy, and it is the complexity and changeability of this form of literacy that we have investigated based on the data of the PISA and PIRLS research projects. The development of reading literacy depends on many factors related to individual pupils and their families, as well as on teaching reading and school environment.

Qualitative methodology and the technique of group interview were used in the research. The problem questions were selected from the publication *Teaching Reading in Europe* (2011). These include: phonological awareness, grapho-phonemic skills, reading fluency, vocabulary adoption and development methods, reading comprehension monitoring, co-operative learning, the use of graphic and semantic knowledge organizers, asking and answering, identifying textual structures, and text compression. These elements were analyzed in the

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context of: The Curriculum for the school subject Montenegrin-Serbian, Bosnian, Croatian Language and Literature (2011); the textbooks currently in use; teaching methods for learning reading; strategies for learning reading; the role of the school environment which is (un)supportive of reading; family support to a pupil's reading literacy. Thirty-six teachers from four elementary schools took part in the group interviews.

The research results have been presented within the framework in which the elements of reading literacy are analyzed relative to each contextual factor. Apart from stating that the curriculum, textbooks and other contextual factors contain good elements which enable a good quality learning of reading, the respondents also observed that there were some segments in need of improvement. Their suggestions are presented as follows:

- Some parts of the curriculum should be more precise in terms of: vocabulary development, collaborative learning, and more time allotted for reading practice.

A clear definition of the standards for the enrichment of vocabulary is the main issue here. As far as additional reading practice is concerned, though it is indeed necessary, the extra time for this practice should be organized also outside regular lessons of mother tongue. Reading should be an important segment of other school subjects as well and included in extra and remedial work, literary clubs, homework assignments, and the like.

- Reading material must be inspiring and interesting to children and accompanied by didactic and methodological apparatus of questions and answers.

The curriculum does not prescribe compulsory reading lists in the first two cycles of elementary school. All texts are only suggestions for reading and the selection of titles can be different for different classes depending on the class abilities. This freedom of choice is rarely used in practice and teachers should be reminded of the autonomy they have in terms of text selection.

As far as the didactic and methodological apparatus is concerned, previous studies have shown that this segment of the language-related textbooks has been resolved successfully. When it comes to literature textbooks, it is important to note that one part of questions and answers has been provided in the textbooks, while some questions and answers, as well as methodological organization, have been described in detail in teachers' manuals.

- Schools must be more supportive of reading in terms of better supplies of books in classrooms and school libraries, particularly the books for the youngest readers.

Unlike more affluent societies, school libraries in our country cannot boast of too many new books. Pupils are more inclined to buy the books listed as compulsory reading in bookshops than to borrow them from the school library. It is very likely that many pupils do not even know about the possibilities that libraries offer. As the recent trends in the activities of libraries indicate, libraries could reach their readers by organizing regular workshops, literary evenings or book days, as well as literary clubs and other activities promoting reading.

- Our respondents believe that parents must be included in their children's efforts to learn to read. Their role is developed through activities such as talking to their children, reading picture books together, and even reading books together on a daily basis.

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The results of the research indicate that the improvement of reading literacy requires the improvement of some of its aspects as well. Continual methodological improvement of all segments related to teaching and learning reading must be a permanent objective of schools and of language teaching in particular.

**Key words:** subject program, teaching mother tongue, reading instruction, learning to read, learning by reading.

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