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**Original
research paper**


Paper received: Aug 6 2024
Paper accepted: Oct 31 2024
Article Published: Dec 20 2024

The potential of literary texts in integrative teaching from teachers' perspective²

Extended summary

Teaching contents have high educational value and accelerate learning when they are acquired through problem-solving processes and when the acquired knowledge becomes applicable in everyday situations. This approach is made possible by integrative teaching, which provides the opportunity to connect content both within a subject and across different subjects. Literary texts offer various possibilities for establishing internal connections within the content of one subject, as well as to connect the content of one school subject with another. Their importance as a starting point for integrative teaching is well described in theoretical literature, but the question arises as to how teachers assess the possibilities offered by literary texts in integrative teaching practices. A research was organized to determine this, and the research tasks were aimed at establishing how teachers evaluate the integrative possibilities provided by literary texts from different genres, and what their attitudes regarding how the application of literary texts as starting points for integration influences the organization and dynamics of teaching are. The research is a part of a broader research on the use of literary texts as integrative starting points in the junior grades of primary school, which included a sample of 225 teachers who conducted classes in the territory of the Republic of Serbia during the 2021–2022

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2 The research was conducted as a part of project activities at the Faculty of Education, University of Kragujevac, funded by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovations of the Republic of Serbia (contract no. 451-03-65/2024-03 since 26 January, 2024).

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school year. A questionnaire was constructed as a measuring instrument, containing questions and a five-point scale for assessment, and the results were processed using descriptive statistical measures, frequencies, percentages, and the chi-square test.

The results show that the respondents most positively evaluate the integrative possibilities offered by different types of short original stories. Next, they rated the possibilities provided by folk fairy tales, followed by those offered by novels and fables. They rated the possibilities offered by stories about animals and humorous folk tales somewhat lower, and the possibilities provided by original lyrics, dramatic texts, folk lyrics, and short oral traditions were rated even lower. The lowest rating was given to the possibilities of folk epic poetry as an integrative starting point. The results indicate that the literary genres whose integrative possibilities were best rated by the respondents belong to prose literature, which could be linked to the abundance and modernity of the themes addressed in these literary works, as well as themes familiar to students. It is also related to an easier assimilation of information presented in a narrative form. However, the lowest evaluation of the integrative possibilities of epic poetry does not support the observation of its narrative potential in practical integration. A discrepancy is also observed between the methodological theory, which highlights the integrative possibilities of epic poetry, and its estimated value by practitioners. This points to the need for further exploration of the reasons behind this discrepancy.

When it comes to the impact of literary texts as starting points for integration on the organization of teaching, most respondents (70.6%) fully or mostly agree that literary texts can be used as a starting point for integration in all four junior grades of primary school. They also generally have positive views about applying literary texts as integrative starting points not only in native language classes but also in other school subjects. However, their opinions are somewhat divided on the idea that the selection of an appropriate literary text can make its use more difficult, and thus hinder the implementation of integration in some subjects. This suggests that, in practice, the selection of suitable literary texts can complicate the application of integration. When it comes to the impact of literary texts in integration on the dynamics of teaching, most respondents fully (48.9%) or mostly (36.0%) agree that using literary texts as starting points in integrative teaching positively affects the dynamics of the lesson because it allows for a change and use of different forms and methods of work.

The results show that teachers recognize and positively evaluate the possibilities that distinct types of literary texts offer in integrative teaching. They also have positive attitudes regarding the impact of literary texts on the organization and dynamics of integrative teaching, believing that this method can be applied throughout junior primary school and that literary texts as a starting point for integration can be used not only in native language classes but also in other school subjects. However, the results also highlight potential challenges, such as the issue of selecting appropriate texts. This implies that practitioners require additional support in this type of teaching, and some of the proposed solutions include creating curated selections of literary texts that facilitate integration, developing methodological handbooks to accompany such selections, and, most importantly, designing and creating textbooks that support integration.

Keywords: integrative teaching, literary text, Serbian language teaching methodology, lower grades of primary school, Serbian language

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