

THE CONTENT OF THE MOTHER TONGUE TEXTBOOKS – CRITICAL AND PROSPECTIVE VIEW

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Abstract

The paper is focused on the opinion of teachers based on their experiential and reflexive teaching of mother tongue in formal primary and secondary education in the Republic of Macedonia. The problem of the structure of the textbooks and the usage of textbooks arises from the character of the national curricula, differences in the classrooms all over the country, different contextual and situational conditions.

The used methodology can be described as: descriptive, quantitative, and based on questioning as a research technique. The general hypothesis of the research is: The teachers reflect on the content of the mother tongue textbooks in a negative way as being useless, inapplicable and inappropriate.

The discussion about the results is based on statistical-quantitative techniques: average, means, standard deviation and ranking.

The results show that the general hypothesis is confirmed and with the given conclusions we propose some structural and contextual changes in the content of the mother tongue textbooks which are used in the educational system.

Keywords: mother tongue textbooks, content of the mother tongue textbooks, curriculum design, didactic changes.

1 INTRODUCTION

Teaching language is a challenge. The challenges begin with the first lessons in the initial teacher education and grow up with the contextual and situational settings which provoke any creative person.

Language instruction has three main goals: 1) to help children become more effective language users; 2) to influence children to speak in socially preferred ways; and 3) to provide children with knowledge and terminology so that they may understand and discuss how language works [1]. Therefore, scholars often raise questions about the content of the language development curriculum. Should pupils learn about the phonological, morphological, syntactical, lexical, and semantic language structural elements in isolation of the real everyday contexts or should children learn the grammar as part of their everyday language transactions with the people that they are close to? There are also claims that the best method for pupils' language development is learning the language across the curriculum, because: "a) reading and writing are tools for learning; b) literacy requirements continually increase in school and society; and c) content area teachers can teach content area reading and writing best" [2]. As it is stated by Thaiss, "...language-across-the-curriculum attitude implies the restructuring of curricula away from so-called "coverage" of content and toward creation of opportunities for such means of learning as discussions, games, and in-class writing projects." [3] According to experience of Thaiss, "... language across the curriculum is not primarily a teaching method or a set of activities, but is basically a way to describe fundamental principles that some teachers bring to, and have learned from, their calling." [3]

Mother tongue language is one of the core subjects in the curricula for primary and secondary compulsory education in the Republic of Macedonia. All class teachers and those who teach language as mother tongue (Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish and Serbian language) in primary and secondary school have the legal obligation to work on the objectives in the National curriculum developed by the Bureau for educational development and accepted and approved by the Ministry of Education and Science. Mother tongue textbooks go also through the same procedure of preparation and legal affirmation, which is regulated by special *Law for textbooks for primary and secondary education*. [4] In this law, the textbooks are defined as "... basic teaching media and a resource of knowledge for realization of the educational objectives defined in the curricula for primary and secondary education". [4]

The procedure for preparation of all the textbooks, including those for the language teaching and learning, since 2010, is defined within the frame of the manual *A concept for writing textbook and a methodology for evaluation of a textbook*, published by the Bureau for educational development. The basic criteria for writing textbook, in this manual, are: “harmonization of the content of the textbook to the subject curriculum; ... scientific bases of the content of the textbook; ... harmonization of the content of the textbook to the ages of the pupil; ... The textbook has an affective function, it triggers positive attitude to the science/knowledge, develops the national and citizen identity, multiculturalism and the gender balance...” [5] The specific criteria for writing textbook for mother tongue language describe that the textbooks must have topics related to all curriculum areas: “Language, Literature and school readings, Expression and Creativity and Media culture in primary, i.e. Language and literature for the secondary education.” [5] It is also stated that the topics in the textbooks must be equal with the hours for lessons allocated in the curriculum and all the terms related to the topics and stated in the curriculum must be covered. [5]

In the chapter *Methodology for evaluation of the textbook* in the same manual, it is explained and the instrument designed for that purpose is attached, in which the dominant place is given to the previously mentioned specific criteria. [5]

Pollard, Thiessen and Filer respond to the well-defined centralized curriculum which implies using of concrete, well related and subordination proceeded and produced textbooks by answering with the so called “perspectives” of pupils. [6] They proposed that the “...pupil’s views should be heard...” and “...taking pupil’s perspectives seriously can contribute to the quality of school life, the raising of standards of educational achievement and understanding of many important educational issues” [6]. In the same direction is the understanding of Popp S.M., that: “To provide students with the best possible associations with literature, it is important to select a wide variety of books from the best examples of all the genres” [7]. Having in mind the centralized curriculum already explained in this part, which is reality in the Republic of Macedonia, and the views which imply accounting perceptions of pupils and teachers, we carried out a research, which will acknowledge us with the views about the content of the textbooks of teachers who teach mother tongue language.

2 METHODOLOGY

The research question is a result of the experience of the researchers taken from the practical reactions of mother tongue language teachers during the implementation of some project activities (workshops and brainstorming sessions). The reactions of teachers were focused on the structure of the curriculum and on the level of congruence of the curriculum and the language textbooks.

Because of that we have decided, in this case, to answer the research question: What are the teachers’ perceptions about the influences of the content of mother tongue language textbooks on the practical realization of the curricula and what is the level of teachers’ satisfaction of contextual and situational conditions? The subject of the research is to identify the relationship between the current form and content of the mother tongue language and the curricular, contextual and situational settings. According to this we set the main hypotheses of the research: The teachers have the perception that the form and content of mother tongue language textbooks not fully cover all of the aspects of the curricular, contextual and situational settings. The sample of the research is random and structured: 129 all class teachers that teach Macedonian language as mother tongue; 54 all class teachers that teach Albanian language as mother tongue; 27 all class teachers that teach Turkish language as mother tongue; 25 all class teachers that teach Serbian language as mother tongue; 76 subject teachers that teach Macedonian language as mother tongue; 28 subject teachers that teach Albanian language as mother tongue, which means 339 teachers in total.

By using questionnaires, we asked them for their perceptions based on their experience in using of mother tongue language textbooks. The questionnaire for the teachers was consisted of 3 closed questions with categories which describe certain conditions and 1 open question, which gives possibilities to the teachers to proposed measures for improvement of the content and structure of the textbooks.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

By selection of one category (Strongly disagree; Disagree; Partly agree; Agree and Fully agree) for every given statement, the teachers were asked to express their **perception about the relevance of the content of the textbooks to the curriculum**. All of the statements were given in a positive sense.

According to calculation of the frequency, average and standard deviation of the answers of each given statement, we can see that the overall calculation shows that: (See Table 1)

- Pondered values of averages show that for the teachers, the higher values (3,274) has the statement *The content of the textbook covers all compulsory activities planned in the curriculum, The terms planned to be acquired by the curriculum can be fully covered with the textbook* (3,224) and *The content of the textbook gives balanced possibilities for learning of every aspect of the language* (2,935).
- The lowest pondered values of averages (1,735) is for the statement *There is no need to use learning materials that support textbooks for realization of the curriculum, The content of the textbook covers all of the optional activities planned in the curriculum* (1,743) and *There are enough topics for covering the objectives in the curriculum* (1,855). The pondered values of all the other statements are within the frame of the categories Strongly disagree and Disagree.
- The values of standard deviation for every statement is in range of (1,067- 1,321). The lowest value has the statement *The content of the textbook covers all of the aspects of the language curriculum* and the highest values of standard deviation has the statements *There are enough topics for covering the objectives in the curriculum*.
- The highest percent of the overall answers 36,152% is given to the category *Strongly disagree* and the lowest percent of the answers 8,325% to the category *Fully agree*.

Table 1. Perception of teachers about the relevance of the content of the textbooks to the curriculum.

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Partly agree	Agree	Fully agree	χ	σ
The content of the textbook covers all of the aspects of the language curriculum.	55	157	59	54	14	2,454	1,067
The content of the textbook gives balanced possibilities for learning of every aspect of the language.	59	70	89	76	45	2,935	1,286
There are enough topics for covering the objectives in the curriculum.	211	48	29	20	31	1,855	1,321
There are enough topics for developing proposed activities in the curriculum.	121	111	70	6	31	2,159	1,197
The terms planned to be acquired by the curriculum can be fully covered with the textbook.	44	59	47	155	34	3,224	1,225
The textbook gives possibilities for achieving the objectives in the curriculum.	166	57	88	15	13	1,973	1,127
The content of the textbook covers all of the compulsory activities planned in the curriculum.	43	49	54	158	35	3,274	1,207
The content of the textbook covers all of the optional activities planned in the curriculum.	201	78	32	2	26	1,743	1,156
There is no need to use learning materials that support textbooks for realization of the curriculum.	210	56	44	11	18	1,735	1,134
Σ	1103	685	512	497	254		
%	36,152	22,452	16,781	16,290	8,325		

According to the analysis of the results about the teachers' perception of the relevance of the content of the textbooks to the curriculum we can conclude that the teachers mostly strongly disagree with the given statements. Teachers believe that the content of the textbooks doesn't cover the optional activities planned in the curriculum, the topics are not enough for covering the set goals in the

curriculum and also that there is a need for using learning materials for supporting the role of the textbook during teaching and learning.

The analysis also shows that the teachers have agreed that the content of the textbooks covers the terms in the curriculum planned to be acknowledged by the pupil and the realization of the compulsory activities written in the curriculum.

This means that there are a lot of non-covered aspects of the mother tongue language curriculum with the content of the textbooks which are currently used in the language teaching and learning in the Republic of Macedonia.

In the same way, by selection of one of the five categories for the given statements, the teachers were asked to express their **perception about the relevance of the content of the textbooks to the learning and teaching situations**. The statements were also given in a positive sense. According to the similar calculation, we can see that (see Table 2):

- Pondered values of averages show that according to the answers of the teachers, the highest values (2,162) are for the statement There is enough space for being creative in realization of the curriculum by practicing situational teaching and the statements The content of the textbook gives opportunity to deal with the changes in the number of pupils in the class per day and The content of the textbooks gives opportunity to deal with the influences of the weather conditions on the curriculum (1,991).
- The lowest pondered values of averages (1,398) are about the statement The content of the textbook gives opportunity to deal with current interest of pupils not connected with the curriculum, than The content of the textbook gives opportunity to deal with the differences among teachers (1,460) and The content of the textbook gives opportunity to deal with current level of motivation of the pupils (1,513). The pondered values of all of the other statements are in the frame of the categories Strongly disagree and Disagree.
- The pondered values of averages of the answers of the teachers for every statement is in range of (1,398- 2,162).
- The values of standard deviation for every statement are in the range of 0,789- 1,470. The lowest value has the statement The content of the textbook gives opportunity to deal with current interest of pupils not connected with curriculum and the highest value has the statement The content of the textbook gives opportunity to deal with the changes in the number of pupils in the class per day.
- The biggest percent of the overall answers 64,274% is given to the category Strongly disagree and the lowest percent of the answers 6,162% to the category Agree.

Table 2. Perception of teachers about the relevance of the content of the textbooks to the learning and teaching situations.

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Partly agree	Agree	Fully agree	χ	σ
The content of the textbook gives opportunity to deal with the changes in the number of pupils in the class per day.	211	34	23	28	43	1,991	1,470
The content of the textbook gives opportunity to deal with the differences among pupils in acquired knowledge per goal.	200	45	56	5	33	1,897	1,296
The content of the textbook gives opportunity to deal with the differences among teachers.	254	45	13	23	4	1,460	0,935

The content of the textbook gives opportunity to deal with the differences in weather conditions that influence the realization of the curriculum.	199	57	11	31	41	1,991	1,440
The content of the textbook gives opportunity to deal with the differences among pupils in their success in writing homework.	233	48	11	38	9	1,649	1,133
The content of the textbook gives opportunity to deal with the differences among pupils in their health condition.	243	23	32	28	13	1,658	1,170
The content of the textbook gives opportunity to deal with the current interest of pupils not connected with curriculum.	252	54	20	11	2	1,398	0,789
The content of the textbook gives opportunity to deal with current level of motivation of pupils	243	45	31	13	7	1,513	0,954
There is enough space for being creative in realization of the curriculum by practicing situational teaching.	126	135	21	11	46	2,162	1,326
Σ	1961	486	218	188	198		
%	64,274	15,929	7,145	6,162	6,490		

The analysis of the results about the teachers' perception of the relevance of the textbooks' content for the learning and teaching situations can lead us to conclude that the dominant category chosen by the teachers is strongly disagreement with the positive statements given in the question. According to the teachers, situational factors affecting the realization of the National language curricula are forgotten, not taken seriously and seen as non-existing.

The variation in situations in the classrooms during realization of the language curriculum such as dealing with the differences among pupils in their success in writing homework, differences in a pupils' motivation, pupils' interests, pupils' health condition, differences in acquiring the knowledge etc., according to teachers, are issues that remain uncovered by the content of the language textbooks.

This means that the non-covered situational aspects of the mother tongue language curriculum with the content of the textbooks is a possible negative factor affecting the behavior of teachers, satisfaction of their work engagement, the language abilities and capacities of pupils etc. in the Republic of Macedonia.

By using the same methodology, we have come to results about ***the teachers' perceptions about the relevance of the content of the textbooks for the learning and teaching context***. The results are presented in the Table 3, and according to which:

- Pondered values of averages show that according to the answers of the teachers, the highest values (2,496) has the statement *The content of the textbooks is adapted to the differences among schools and classrooms in teaching media*, the statements *The content of the textbook gives opportunity to every pupil to learn alone* (2,348) and the statement *The content of the textbook is "sensitive" about the differences in a sense of development of the local community* (2,310).
- The lowest pondered values of averages (1,617) are about the statement *There is enough space for being creative in realization of the curriculum by practicing contextual teaching*, then *The content of the textbook gives opportunity to respond adequately to the learning and teaching of pupils with special educational needs in the classroom* (1,661) and *The content of the textbooks is "sensitive" about the differences among the location of schools (city, village)* (1,664). The pondered values of all of the statements are in the frame of the categories Strongly disagree and Disagree.
- The pondered values of averages of the answers of the teachers for every statement are in the range of 1,617- 2,496.

- The values of the standard deviation for every statement are in the range of 0,784- 1,456. The lowest value has the statement *There is enough space for being creative in realization of the curriculum by practicing contextual teaching* and the highest value has the statement *The content of the textbooks is "sensitive" about the differences in a sense of development of the local community*.
- The highest percent of the overall answers (45,103%) is given to the category *Strongly disagree* and the lowest percent of the answers (7,021%) - to the category *Strongly agree*.

Table 3. Perception of teachers about the relevance of the textbooks' content for the learning and teaching context.

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Partly agree	Agree	Fully agree	X	σ
The content of the textbook gives opportunity to adequately respond to the learning and teaching of talented and gifted pupils in the classroom.	155	154	11	3	16	1,735	0,938
The content of the textbook gives opportunity to adequately respond to the learning and teaching of pupils with special educational needs in the classroom.	245	32	12	32	18	1,661	1,224
The content of the textbook gives opportunity to every pupil to learn alone.	145	56	57	37	44	2,348	1,442
The content of the textbooks is "sensitive" about the differences among the classrooms in the country.	155	78	65	11	30	2,065	1,253
The content of the textbooks is "sensitive" about the differences among the location of schools (city, village).	199	102	12	5	21	1,664	1,061
The content of the textbooks is "sensitive" about the differences in a sense of development of the local community.	154	58	32	58	37	2,310	1,456
The content of the textbooks is adapted to the differences among schools and classrooms in teaching media.	67	129	79	36	28	2,496	1,163
The content of the textbooks is adapted to the differences among teachers in their life-long learning engagement.	98	147	56	11	27	2,180	1,126
The content of the textbooks is adapted to the differences among teachers in their teaching experience.	143	111	28	45	12	2,032	1,163
There is enough space for being creative in realization of the curriculum by practicing contextual teaching.	168	154	1	11	5	1,617	0,784
Σ	1529	1021	353	249	238		
%	45,103	30,118	10,413	7,345	7,021		

From the analysis of the results in the Table 3 which presents teachers' perceptions of the relevance of the textbooks' content to the learning and teaching context, it can be seen that more than 75% of the answers are with the negative prefix on the positively given statements in the question. That means that the contextual characteristics of the realization of the mother tongue language curriculum are not covered by the content of the language textbooks.

The answer of the level of relevance of the content of textbooks to the contextual characteristics of realization of the mother tongue language curriculum related to taking care about the differences among pupils in the classroom, the level of development of the local community, the differences in teaching experience and engagement in life-long learning of teachers etc. are cumulated in the answers that there is no enough space for being creative in realization of the curriculum by practicing contextual teaching (as opposite to the given statement).

The teachers had a chance to support their negative perception of the given statement with giving **relevant experiential proposals for improvement of the usage of language textbooks**. The proposals stated in Table 4 are selections of all of the teachers' proposals. Selection has been made by the frequencies and percent of the overall number of teachers.

Table 4. Teachers' proposals for improvement of the usage of the mother tongue language textbooks.

Statements	f	%
Only one textbook doesn't cover all the aspect of the mother tongue curriculum.	121	35,693
Every teacher can have a freedom in using teaching materials during language teaching as mother tongue.	103	30,383
Every pupil must have textbooks with different content for successful learning of language as mother tongue.	96	28,319
Only one textbook is not enough to cover all of the aspects of the teaching language as mother tongue.	96	28,319
The content of the mother tongue language textbooks should be different for different context of teaching and learning.	87	25,664
The teacher can have a freedom in designing teaching materials during teaching language as mother tongue.	79	23,304
The content of the mother tongue language textbooks should be different for different situations of teaching and learning.	72	21,239
It is very good for the teacher to have a textbook that is covering the language curriculum.	67	19,764
The realization of the language learning curriculum (as mother tongue) can be done without any officially approved textbook.	56	16,519
We need much more supporting learning and teaching materials- media in order to improve the usage of the mother tongue language textbooks.	55	16,224
There should be more official language textbooks for mother tongue.	48	14,159

The presented results in a Table 4 show that the teachers are convinced in the statements given with the previous three questions. We can see that there are ideas and propoals that are directly related to the character of the curriculum, proposals that indicate the need for having more resources to be used in the language teaching of mother tongue, ideas for the needs of having legal bases for creating and using textbooks and other resources which are not officially adopted and approved by the Ministry of Education.

4 CONCLUSION

Being a teacher of mother tongue is a privilege of every teacher. The privilege comes with the fact that almost in all educational systems in the world mother tongue language curriculum is crucial and is core subject which sets the bases for the next steps of literacy. Moreover, it contributes to the continuity of the mission for the national heritage and for developing the strength of the personal perception.

Therefore, we find that the teachers' perception about the aspects of using textbooks during learning and teaching mother tongue as part of the language curriculum is crucial in lightening at least one of the possible milestones for having the best practice.

The language textbooks currently used by the mother tongue language teacher, according to the teachers, can't cover all of the aspects of the mother tongue language curriculum, especially the aspects which are not strictly mentioned in the curriculum, in other words, are optional and non-compulsory.

Teachers stressed many aspects that are uncovered by the official language textbooks as part of the so called, hidden curriculum. From teachers' perception, it can be seen that almost all situational aspects of teaching language as mother tongue (dealing with the differences among pupils in their success in writing homework, the differences regarding the pupils' motivation, pupils' interests, pupils' health condition, the differences in acquiring the knowledge, etc.) can't have full and successful realization.

The contextual aspect of the hidden mother tongue curriculum, such as taking care of the differences among pupils in the classroom, level of development of the local community, differences in teaching experience and engagement in life-long learning of teachers, with the usage of the current official language textbooks, according to the teachers, will have incomplete, weak and unsatisfactory realization.

This opens the doors of thinking about possible changes in: the teaching language policy, the design of the textbooks, the character of the curriculum, and the role of the language teachers in creating positive and appealing classroom atmosphere during the realization of the language curriculum.

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