

DIFFERENCES IN THE ATTITUDE TOWARDS READING AFTER ONE YEAR OF MIXED- CLASSIC AND ON-LINE TEACHING DURING COVID-19. A CASE STUDY BASED ON A PRIMARY CLASSROOM

**Rucsandra HOSSU, Ph.D. Candidate,
Faculty of Educational Sciences, Psychology and Social Sciences,
"Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad,
ruxy_hossu@yahoo.com**

Abstract: *Reading is influenced by a series of factors that depend both on the reader, as well as on the text or on the background. In regard to the students, the attitude towards reading is an affective-motivational variable, which mobilizes the energy resources towards the reading activity. On the other hand, the manner through which the text is presented or the context of the subject of Romanian language is taught may be the connectors of the formation of a positive attitude towards reading. The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of a mixed-classic and online teaching year on the attitude towards reading in the case of a primary class. The scores before and after the mixed teaching have indicated a constant attitude towards reading, but also a significant increase in the attitude towards academic reading as compared to the recreational one, after the online period. There are provided suggestions of instructional design that include the digitalization of the teaching strategies.*

Key-words: *reading attitude; school performance; primary school; COVID-19*

I. INTRODUCTION

The finality of the Romanian educational system is that of shaping students with a whole, harmonious and free development, so that they adapt and they are able to face the challenges they might face in their professional, social and personal life. This educational goal is transposed, to a more reduced scale, in the development of the eight core competences set at European level. The skills have operational value, correlate to the performance and can be measured on the base of certain performance standards (Chiş, 2005). The component triad of the competences consists of knowledge, skills and attitudes. The operationalization of these three

elements depends on the curricular area or on the school subjects falling under that particular field.

The competence for the mother tongue is the first one of the eight to be mentioned in the European documents. Although the classification does not include the hierarchy of the competences as well, we nonetheless bear in mind the fact that having knowledge of the mother tongue and being able to operate with it, is a basic condition for the formation of the other educational competences. Although he might have knowledge and skills in a certain field, it is essential that the student manifests a positive attitude towards the school subjects as well. The continuation and deepening of a school subject in superior classes also depends on the attitude towards that particular subject, as well as after the completion of compulsory education, at academic level and even non-formal, in day-to-day life.

In primary classes, the mother tongue competence is acquired in the preparatory class, the first grade and the second grade within the discipline *Romanian Communication*, whereas in the third and fourth grade within the discipline named *Romanian language and literature*. Both subjects target four general competences built around the receiving/expression and the oral/written axes. The order of their appropriation respects the developmental characteristics of the children: receiving the oral message – expression of the oral message – receiving the written message – expression of the written message. Although it may seem that these competences are structured in a hierarchical mode, the acquisition of a competence being conditioned by the appropriation of the previous one, the learning contents are tackled in an integrated manner in school practice, one activity having the ability to target the development of more types of particular competences.

With reference to the assessment of the mother tongue competence (Romanian language), the students are graded with marks corresponding to the four levels of acquisition of the basic competence: (1).very good; (2).good; (3).sufficient; (4).insufficient. The assessments consist of written and oral parts, targeting both oral-written and receiving-expression components. At a national level, the assessment tests target the written component specifically, particularly the competence of receiving the written message. The focus on the receiving of the written texts is determined by the international framework, more precisely by the presence of functional illiteracy. It was noticed, for example, as a result of the international assessments, that almost half of the Romanian students do not comprehend what they are reading, and thus cannot use the information of a text they read in day-to-day life.

Related to the functional-communicative model, reading is not developed independently, but in relation to the listening and written and oral expression processes. The two subjects bear different names, the distinctive

element being the use of the term *communication* for the 0, 1st and 2nd grades, and that of *literature* for the 3rd and 4th grades. From the terminology analysis of the two names, there results a focus on the communicative function of the Romanian language in the case of small children, and on communication and the analysis of both literary and non-literary texts in the case of bigger children. The focus on one of these elements might influence the attitude of the students towards this subject as well. The analysis of the texts presupposes a higher level of difficulty in the processing of the linguistic information, fact which makes reading appear rather like an academic task instead of a recreational one.

The relation between attitude and behaviour is intensely studied, particularly in the field of social psychology. Constructs such as social representations, cognitions or social emotions are deemed to be an interpretive model of the social world and a filter through which the environmental information is sifted. Nevertheless, the direction of the attitude-behaviour course is not clarified, empirical studies emphasizing that in the case of a cognitive dissonance, the subjects modify their attitude so that it matches the behaviour, thus reducing the lack of harmony between thought, emotion and action.

The interest regarding the relation between the attitude towards reading, the reading performance and the gender of the subjects is several decades old. With reference to the gender, it appears that girls manifest, generally, a more positive attitude towards reading (Nonte, et al., 20180). In a case study based on a survey, Askov & Fischbach (1973) noticed a significantly positive relation between the attitude towards reading and the comprehension of it, but not with the decoding of the read words. Furthermore, girls have declared that they have a more positive attitude than the boys. With regard to the stabilisation of the attitude, the authors have noticed that the scholar level is not related to the attitude, the average grades being relatively similar to the children from the 1st and 3rd grades, that is if comprehension as a moderating factor is excluded. More recently, McGeown & Johnston (2009) have noticed that the ability to read, which was measured with standardized tests, correlates positively with the attitude towards reading ($p < 0.010$) in the case of 10 years old students.

The attitude towards reading appears to be modifying in time, and that in the negative sense. In a transversal type of study, Nootens, et. al (2019) have measured the attitude towards reading in children of the 5th to the 8th grade from Canada. The results have highlighted a stabilisation of the attitude over the course of two years of school, grades 5-6 and 7-8, but a change of attitude as the result of the transition from the elementary level (5-6) to the middle one (7-8). Both boys and girls have shown an attitude less

favorable in middle school, both in academic reading and the recreational one.

With regard to the relation between attitude and teaching in class, the empirical studies have emphasized that the attitude towards academic reading is related to the teaching methods, but also to the mode through which teachers connect the recreational reading to the academic one (Early, 2011). Lockwood (2012) has demonstrated, in a study conducted over the period of two years, that students from primary grades whose teachers also used teaching strategies that facilitated the development of a positive attitude towards reading have presented a higher level of the attitude towards reading. Recreational reading, instead, appears to be influenced mostly by factors that belong to environment of the family, such as the number of available books, and less by variables linked to the educational environment, such as the existence of school libraries (Nonte, et al., 20180).

To conclude, the attitude towards reading is multi-componential, its predictors varying according to the type of the reading activity (recreational versus academic), the gender of the subjects (girls versus boys), but also the environment (academic or extracurricular). Moreover, the stabilisation in time of the attitude towards reading tends to falter once with the transition to a higher education, being in relation to the performance of the reading tests.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The relation between attitude and performance is one of reciprocity. Good performance in a field may be associated with a positive attitude towards the task. In a similar manner, a positive attitude may mobilise the motivational and energy resources for action, determining the rise of the performance.

The attitudes are formed in time, as a result of experiences. It has been demonstrated, for instance, through the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance, that the subjects can change their initial attitude towards a phenomenon to reestablish the cognitive balance, if faced with certain operating mobilities. The studies have highlighted that the students' attitude towards reading, both the academic and the recreational one, modifies in time. This fact depends on both personal variables (such as interest or cognitive resources) and background variables (such as the teaching activity). The academic year 2019-2020 was marked by a major change in regard to the teaching strategy, namely the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused the transition from the teaching in class to the online teaching. In this situation, we are asking ourselves to what extent was this new challenge associated with a change in the attitude towards reading. Additionally, research has revealed an association between the attitude towards reading and the ability to read, measured by standardized tests, and less with the

academic results in the discipline of the mother tongue. Consequently, we have formulated the following research questions:

- Is there a correlation between the attitude towards reading and the academic results in the discipline of the mother tongue in the case of primary-class children?
- Is there a change of level in the attitude towards reading after an academic year taught in a mixed-classic and online manner?

III. METHODOLOGY

This study is a case study of a longitudinal type, with the measurement of the dependent variable (VD=attitude towards reading) before (the end of the 2nd grade) and after (the beginning of the 4th grade) the interference of the independent variable (VI= mixed teaching: classic and online).

3.1. Subjects

Within this study has participated a class of students (N=17 students), from which 11 were boys and 6 were girls. In the pre-test phase the students were in the 2nd grade, whereas in the post-test phase, they were in the 4th grade. The students' school of origin is a neighbourhood one, from the county of Arad, which is considered to be of a medium level, as compared to schools situated in more central spots.

3.2. Tools

a. The attitude towards reading

The attitude towards reading was measured using a public-domain tool, namely *The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey* (ERAS), whose authors are McKenna & Kear (1990). The tool contains 20 questions that measure two aspects of reading: recreational reading (10 items) and academic reading (10 items). Recreational reading includes items related to extracurricular reading activities and the pleasure of reading in leisure time. Academic reading refers to the attitude towards reading in the school environment. Each question is followed by four scenarios, in which a cartoon character is: very happy, a little happy, a little upset, and very upset. Students can answer each question by circling the emotional expression that best suits them. In the present study, the cartoon character was replaced with emoticons that express the emotions described above. An example of a question and answer item is the following:

How do you feel when you read a book on a rainy Saturday?



The answers were rated on a Likert scale, with scores between 1 and 4, the higher score indicating a more positive attitude. Each student can have three scores. The overall individual score can vary between 20 and 80 and represents the general attitude towards reading. The scores on the two subscales, the recreational and academic reading can be situated between 10 and 40.

The authors reported good psychometric qualities of the general attitude and of the two subscales, the coefficients of internal consistency ranging from .74 to .89 (McKenna & Kear, 1990). In the present study, the alpha coefficients were as follows: .90 for the recreational attitude, .83 for the academic attitude and .91 for the general attitude toward reading.

The administration of the questionnaire was done in groups. The experimenter gave the instructions, providing additional explanations if requested. The average time to administer the instrument was 15 minutes.

b. Academic results in the Romanian language.

The academic results in the Romanian language were retrieved from the grade book. The yearly average grade was taken into consideration, grade which can vary from Very good to Insufficient. These grades have been changed into scores, as it follows: Very good=4, Good=3, Sufficient=2, Insufficient=1. According to the teacher, the students have been evaluated through different curricular tests, oral and written.

3.3. The procedure

The original purpose of this study has been that of evaluating the stabilisation in time of the attitude towards reading. The time of COVID-19 had not been anticipated, the online teaching being a variable that occurred during the investigative procedure.

The ERAS scale was applied twice: in June 2019, when the students were at the end of the 2nd grade, and in September 2020, when the students were at the beginning of the 4th grade. The academic results have been retrieved from the grade book of the academic years of 2018-2019 and 2019-2020.

The total number of students from the participating class was that of 24 in the 2nd grade (one student did not pass) and 24 in the 4th (there was a new student in the 3rd grade). Besides the two students that did not participate in the two evaluations, five of the students have been absent from

one of the evaluation phases, and their scores could not be included in the statistical processing.

The teacher of the class from which the students come has over 40 years of experience in teaching and the first teaching degree. The teaching of the Romanian language was an integrated and interactive one in the academic year of 2019-2020. During the online period, which started in March 2020, the courses have been held on a mobile app, but without the video interactions. The teacher used the auxiliary materials that the children previously owned during the teaching. The tasks that were to be done were announced daily, and the teacher would afterwards send personal feedback to the students. Since the situation did not allow for an assessment that would be comparable to the one from the first semester, there were maintained, generally, the grades from the first semester.

IV. RESULTS

a. Pre-test results

Table 4.1. Descriptive analysis for the attitude towards reading and Romanian Language school performance in pre-test

PRE-TEST	Min	Max	Mean	SD	T test
Recreational reading	27.00	40.00	33.05	4.09	t=.928, p>0.050
Academic reading	23.00	40.00	32.35	4.84	
General attitude	50.00	78.00	65.41	8.41	
Romanian Language school performance	1.00	4.00	3 (range)	.75	

As visible in Table 4.1 and Figure 4.1, there may be noticed an average and values of the attitude towards recreational reading (M=33.05) which is higher than the academic one (M=32.35), but this difference is not a significant one (t=.928, p>0.050). Additionally, the grades in Romanian language are at the ranking of 3, which indicates an average score of *Good* for the class.

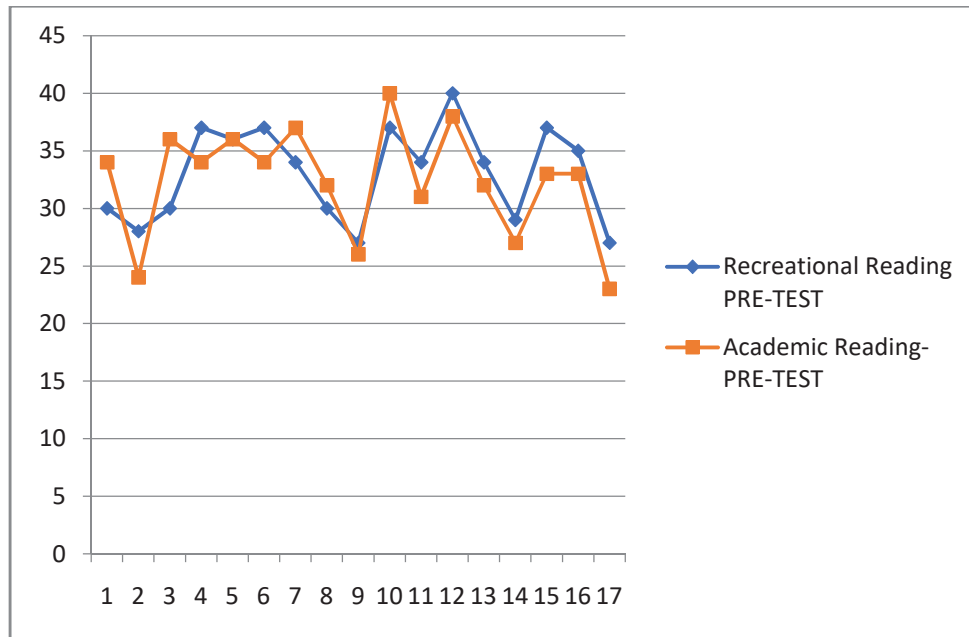


Figure 4.1. The scores for The attitude towards reading in pre-test (before mixed classic and online teaching)

b. Post-test results

Table 4.2. Descriptive analysis for the attitude towards reading and Romanian Language school performance in post-test

PRE-TEST	Min	Max	Mean	SD	T test
Recreational reading	17.00	40.00	32.00	6.55	t=-2.441, p<0.050
Academic reading	28.00	40.00	34.76	3.81	
General attitude	45.00	79.00	66.76	9.66	
Romanian Language school performance	1.00	4.00	3 (range)	.75	

As visible in Table 4.2 and Figure 4.2, there may be noticed an average and values of the attitude towards recreational reading (M=32.00) lower than the academic one (M=34.76), and this difference is a significant one (t=-2.441, p<0.050). Additionally, the scores in Romanian language have a ranking of 3, which indicates an average score of *Good* for the class.

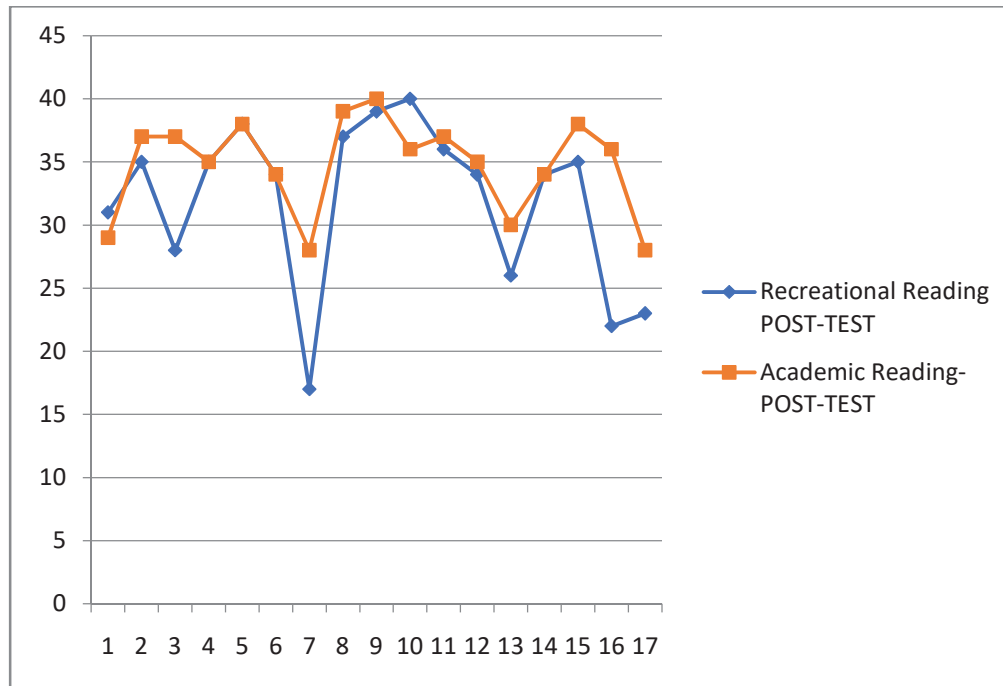


Figure 4.2. The scores for the Attitude towards reading in post-test (after mixed classic and online teaching)

c. Comparisons pre- and post-test

Table 4.3. Differences at the level of the Attitude towards reading and Romanian Language school performance between the two evaluations

	PRE-TEST	POST-TEST	T	P
Recreational reading	33.05	32.00	.595	.560
Academic reading	32.35	34.76	-1.624	.124
General attitude	65.41	66.76	-.450	.659
Romanian Language school performance	3 (range)	3 (range)	-	-

To test whether the differences regarding the attitude towards reading between the two tests are statistically significant we used the T test for dependent samples. The distribution of the data for the three variables was

checked with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which indicated a normal distribution of the scores in the two phases of the testing ($p < 0.050$).

In Table 4.3 there may be noticed that there are no significant differences between the two evaluations in regard to the attitude towards reading, in none of the dimensions ($p > 0.050$). Furthermore, the scholar performance in Romanian language was maintained on the same level in the post-test as well, namely *Good*.

To test the relation between attitude and the academic results we have made an analysis on correlation for the nonparametric tests (Spearman's rho).

Table 4.4. Correlation between Attitude towards reading and Romanian Language school performance in pre-test

	Romanian Language school performance	
	Pre-test	Post-test
Recreational reading	-.042	.343
Academic reading	-.091	.310
General attitude	.000	.158

From Table 4.4. it results that there is no significant correlation between the attitude towards reading and the academic results, the threshold of significance being > 0.050 in all the correlational analysis. However, there may be noticed that, if in pre-test, the correlations were negative, in post-test they are positive, showing a concurrent increase of the two variables.

V. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate the differences at the level of the attitude towards reading in the case of a primary class students, after a year of mixed, classic and online teaching during the period of COVID-19. In addition to this, there was raised the question regarding the extent to which the attitude towards reading is related to the academic results in Romanian language.

The results have shown a rather positive attitude towards reading, both at the end of the 2nd grade and the beginning of the 4th grade, the average being above 3, which corresponds to the feeling of "a little happy". At the end of the 2nd grade, the attitude towards recreational reading was slightly more favourable (although statistically insignificant), as compared to the academic one. At the beginning of the 4th grade, instead, the situation was reversed, the students declaring that they prefer the reading activities at

school, unlike those in their leisure time. The difference was statistically significant, which suggests that after the mixed-teaching period, the children have a more positive attitude towards reading the academic tasks, rather than recreational reading. These results may be due to the fact that during the COVID-19 period and during online teaching, the students have felt more relaxed in the interior of their own homes, and thus they started enjoying the given tasks. Another possibility might be that the help and involvement of the family members in the solving of the tasks have facilitated the development of a more favourable attitude towards the academic reading as well.

Furthermore, the analysis between the pre- and post-tests attitude has not indicated any significant difference, which makes us conclude that the attitude is stable at a certain academic level, as other researches have shown. Generally, the mixed teaching period did not cause significant differences after one year. Nonetheless, the increase in the attitude towards academic reading after the mixed year remains essential.

With reference to the relation between attitude and the academic performance, the results have not indicated a significant correlation in none of the moments of the testing. Furthermore, the relation was a negative one when the children were in the 2nd grade, which may be interpreted as the fact that the attitude is more emotionally impregnated in the case of primary grades, without necessarily having any connection with the performance of the class. In bigger grades, however, the attitude starts going in the same direction as the performance, poor results in Romanian language being associated with a more negative attitude towards reading.

This was a case study done on a single class of students. Naturally, the size and selection of the sample limits the generalization of the results to other people, being suggested a larger number of subjects coming from diverse populations.

At an educational level, the study draws the attention upon the children's need regarding academic teaching. The results appear to show that online teaching may be preferred by children instead of the classical one, at least in the case of reading. This is the reason why teachers should come up with a more digitalized educational design, one which relaxes the didactic relations from the class and which possibly may be associated with a higher academic motivation.

References:

Askov, E., & Fischbach, T. (1973). An Investigation of Primary Pupils' Attitudes toward Reading. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 41(3), 1-7. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20150861>

- Chiș, V. (2005). *Pedagogia contemporană. Pedagogia pentru competențe*. Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință.
- Early, J. (2011). *Leisure Reading Habits: Students Attitudes Toward Their in School Reading Compared to Out of School Reading*. Education Masters. Paper 195.
https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1196&context=education_ETD_masters
- McKenna, M., & Kear, D. (1990). Measuring attitude toward reading: A new tool for teachers. *Reading Teacher*, 43, 626–639.
- Lockwood, M. (2012) Attitudes to reading in English primary schools. *English in Education*, 46(2), 228-246.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-8845.2012.01132.x>
- Nonte, S., Hartwich, L. & Willems, A.S. (2018). Promoting reading attitudes of girls and boys: a new challenge for educational policy? Multi-group analyses across four European countries. *Large-scale Assess Educ*, 6, (5). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40536-018-0057-y>
- Nootens, P., Morin, M.-F., Alamargot, D., Gonçalves, C., Venet M., Labrecque A-M (2019). Differences in Attitudes Toward Reading: A Survey of Pupils in Grades 5 to 8. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 2773. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02773>
- McGeown, S. & Johnston, R. (2009). Gender differences in reading ability and attitudes: Examining where these differences lie. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 32, (2), 199-214.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9817.2008.01389.x>
- ***MinisterulEducațieiNaționale (2013). *Programașcolarăpentru disciplina Comunicare în limbaromână – Clasapregătitoare, clasa I șiclasa a II-a*. Anexa 2. Aprobată prin Ordinul MEN Nr. 3418/19.03.2013. București: MEN.
- ***MinisterulEducațieiNaționale (2014). *Programașcolarăpentru disciplina Limbași literaturaromână. Clasele a III-a – a IV-a*. Anexa nr. 2 la Ordinul MEN Nr. 5003/02.12.2014. București: MEN.
https://edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Legislatie/2019/Legea%20nr%201%20Educatiei%20Nationale%20actualizata%202019.pdf
<http://www.romaniaeducata.eu/>