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TEACHING LANGUAGE AND LANGUAGE CULTURE IN GRAMMAR SCHOOL CURRICULA FOR THE SUBJECT SERBIAN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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Abstract. The paper gives a review of high school curricula for Serbian language and literature—the topics of *Language* and *Language Culture* from 1990 to the present. The structure, tasks, and contents of the curricula from 1990 and 1991, the innovated curriculum from 2011, and the latest, reformed curriculum were reviewed, analysed, and compared. The comparison aims to determine and analyse their similarities and differences in the field of language and language culture, to observe and highlight their positive and negative aspects, and thus, in accordance with the research results, to draw conclusions and finally make suggestions that would contribute to their further improvement.

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Teaching Grammar and Language Culture in Curricula and Teaching Practice³

The teaching of mother tongue in primary and secondary schools is particularly challenging for both teachers and students. The fact that we acquire our mother tongue from birth and that we all master it to some extent is often the reason why children are less motivated to learn the contents of this subject continuously and to devote themselves seriously to this process. Another reason for such an attitude towards this school subject is the fact that today, unfortunately, “we still think that speaking well is a talent, an innate ability, a gift of nature” (Vasić, 1990, p. 60). However, the truth is different: “Linguistic messages are transmitted or received as successfully as the effort and knowledge we have invested to develop our own language and speech” (Vasić, 1990, p. 60). This is the reason why the responsibility of teachers in organizing grammar and language culture teaching at all educational levels is so great.

The acquisition of grammatical and language culture content in primary and secondary education has multiple meanings—educational, pedagogical, intellectual, and psychological. All materials used for the instruction must be in accordance with the findings of linguistics, communication studies, and other related sciences. Since language is constantly changing and the scientific knowledge gained in the aforementioned sciences is always ahead of teaching methodology and practice, the curricula are subject to frequent changes; therefore, all this must be accompanied by constant modernization of the methodological procedures used in teaching.

For the functional study of grammar and the acquisition of knowledge from this field, which is usually abstract and often uninteresting for students, the teaching activity must be based on various sources of linguistic expression, starting from everyday language, through scientific-popular and informative texts, to literary and artistic texts. If we were to reduce grammar to blunt rules

³ Parts of the paper, which refer to the situation in the curricula of high schools until 2013, were taken from the author’s unpublished doctoral dissertation (Михајловић, 2014).

and study it beyond the practice of language, this would certainly lead to grammaticalization. On the other hand, language culture itself cannot be built without knowledge of grammatical norms.

Curricula make very clear specifications about the type and amount of grammatical content which students should acquire at a given age. Since the subject of Serbian Language and Literature is specific in its structure (it is heterogeneous and consists of three thematic units: *Language*, *Literature*, and *Language Culture*), the preparation of the curriculum and its implementation is a very delicate task for the teacher; there must be a correlation between the mentioned subject areas while none of them should be studied in isolation.

“When studying the curriculum, it is not enough just to learn, but it is much more important to understand the principles according to which all the material is distributed in a given school subject. This means understanding the essence of the curriculum, which then enables teachers to properly approach their own syllabus.” (Илић, 1998, p. 130)

It seems that in this process, language and language culture teaching is more endangered in comparison to literature teaching, especially in high schools where its implementation often remains only ‘a dead letter’. In most high schools, even in the most elite ones such as grammar schools, the teaching of grammar is often neglected; the hours that should be devoted to language or language culture are practically transferred to the teaching of literature, completely upsetting the basic concept of the most important subject in the education of students. For this reason, there is frequent criticism of the implementation of curricular content in Serbian Language and Literature by philologists and methodologists, openly condemning the above-mentioned attitude of certain teachers towards grammar teaching. Aleksandar Milanović, for example, notes that:

“[f]inally, someone’s unofficial idea of teaching language and literature in elementary school and literature only in high school, an idea that has not been confirmed in a single curriculum of various convocations of the Ministry of Education over time, became a rule in practice. Even though the curricula still provide for detailed, planned language teaching in high schools and vocational schools, it is practically non-existent.” (Милановић, 2021, p. 31)

Philologist Miloš Kovačević emphasizes that Serbian language and literature is:

“a compulsory subject in primary and secondary education (in all areas: in high schools and all other four- and three-year vocational schools). While in elementary school both the curriculum and the timetable show that the Serbian language is usually one of the most demanding subjects, in high school it is a ‘subject’ on paper, a subject for which there are curricula and

timetables, but unfortunately none in the reality of its implementation in teaching. They simply remain at the level of defined, planned, and mostly unrealized content.” (Kovačević, 2012 according to Милошевић, 2021, pp. 229–230)

The methodologist Veljko Brborić holds a similar opinion:

“In high school, the implementation of language teaching is quite controversial, despite the fact that one fifth of the teaching hours is allocated for it. Our findings suggest that there are problems in the implementation of language instruction and that there are schools and teachers where language instruction is bypassed, which violates the curriculum and leaves students without basic knowledge.” (Брборић, 2005, p. 45)

In the methodological literature, there has always been much less writing about the content of secondary school curricula for the Serbian language than about the grammatical content of elementary school curricula. The reason for this lies in the fact that elementary school curricula have been reformed more frequently than, for example, secondary school curricula, which we have been waiting to reform for almost thirty years. Until recently, i.e., until the adoption of the latest curriculum, teaching in Serbian high schools was carried out according to the curriculum published as early as 1990 (for the first grade) and 1991 (for the second, third, and fourth grades).⁴ Although the need for fundamental reform was discussed more than a decade ago, and although it was expected in 2011⁵, it was postponed for years after that, until 2017, when the reformed curriculum for high school students was finally put into practice⁶. Nevertheless, it is still not possible to speak of completion of the reform of high school education, mainly due to the constant postponement of the baccalaureate, but also due to the lack of standardized criteria and mechanisms to regularly and adequately monitor and evaluate the introduction of new programmes in practice.

Structure of the Grammar School Curricula

The curriculum for Serbian Language and Literature in the first grade of grammar schools is identical for all three types of grammar schools—general education, socio-linguistic, and science—with four hours per week. This number of hours per

⁴ See ППОБ, 1990; ПОВ, 1991.

⁵ In the 2011/2012 school year, an innovated curriculum was introduced in high schools (ПНППГ, 2011) to form the basis for future reformed teaching and learning programmes. However, the curricula developed in the spring of 2011 for subjects in the reformed first grade in high schools were quickly withdrawn.

⁶ See ПППГ, 2020.

week in the general education grammar school remains unchanged in subsequent grades; in the socio-linguistic departments, the number of hours in the second grade is the same as in the first, while in the third and fourth grades, the subject is taught for five hours per week; in the science department, Serbian Language and Literature is taught for three hours in the second and third grades and four hours in the fourth grade. The 1990 (ППОБ, 1990) and 1991 (ПОБ, 1991) syllabus for Serbian Language and Literature, the renewed 2011 syllabus (ПНПНПГ, 2011) and the current grammar school curriculum (ПНПНПГ, 2020) differ significantly in both form and content. The differences in content are more pronounced in the subject area of *Literature* than in the areas of *Language* and *Language Culture*.

The structure of the 1990 and 1991 curricula, as well as the innovated 2011 curriculum, consisted of the objectives of teaching the Serbo-Croatian/Serbian language⁷, three program units, *Literature*, *Language*, and *Language Culture*, and finally, a guide to implementing the curriculum entitled *Method of Implementing the Curriculum*.

“The structure of the current curriculum for grammar schools differs significantly from the previous documents. The Serbian Language and Literature curriculum first defines the goal of the subject, then in the *General Subject Competence* section, it defines, in particular, the competencies of the elementary, intermediate, and advanced level students, and finally, in the *Specific Subject Competence* section, it defines the competencies for each thematic unit and within each thematic unit for each developmental level. The concretization of the curriculum is presented in the tables that show, for each topic, the learning outcomes and then the content whose adoption will contribute to their achievement.” (Михајловић, 2023, p. 54)

In addition, this instructional document also includes standards for student educational achievement. Although this concept was supposed to make it easier for teachers to create curricula, this does not seem to be the case, as we encounter many inconsistencies in the document itself. It seems that the form of the reformed grammar school curriculum requires much greater participation of teachers in its interpretation and further elaboration and implementation because many elements in it are not clear enough, the instructions are scattered and much more difficult to follow than before, in the traditional programmes where the content and instructions for its implementation were more systematically organised. This claim is supported by the fact that in the last grammar school curriculum, the programmes for each grade level were not formally harmonised, so that, for example, *The Standards* in the first-grade programme are listed below the table of *Outcomes*, *Areas/Topics* and *Content*, in the second

⁷ The name Serbo-Croatian was replaced by Serbian in the 1992 curriculum when the amendments were adopted, see ПИДП, 1992, p. 1.

table where the *Outcomes* are unnecessarily repeated (ПІІІІІ, 2020, pp. 9–12). The second-grade programme consists of a table with three columns: *Standards, Outcomes, and Topics and Key Terms of the Programme Content* (ПІІІІІ, 2020, pp. 182–183); the third-grade curriculum contains the same columns, but with slightly different labels: *Standards of Educational Achievement, Outcomes, and Themes/Key Terms/Contents* (ПІІІІІ, 2020, pp. 422–423), while the fourth-grade curriculum lists the standards for each level (elementary, intermediate, and advanced) first, outside the table, while the table has only two columns, *Outcomes* and *Topics/Key Terms/Contents* (ПІІІІІ, 2020, p. 439). Such inconsistencies are unacceptable in the most important educational document on which the entire educational process in high schools is based.

In addition to the changed form, the reformed grammar school curriculum is characterised by several changes in the goals of individual subjects and in the way the curriculum is implemented, compared to the previous one.

“The goal of teaching Serbian Language and Literature, defined in 1990, was supplemented in 2011 to the effect that in addition to forming and educating students to become free, creative and cultural personalities, improving their linguistic and functional competencies is of no less importance.” (Михајловић, 2014, p. 268)

In addition to this requirement, the new document makes special reference to interdisciplinary and cross-curricular networking, as well as to learning outcomes and the development of various competencies such as skills and abilities that can contribute to a functional knowledge that is certainly of greater value than the reproductive skills previously cultivated by students. One of the fundamental goals of today’s grammar school curricula is the desire to develop intellectual breadth, creative thinking, and research curiosity in students through the implementation. In addition, it emphasizes the importance of improving students’ communicative and linguistic values, which can only be achieved if the contents of the educational programmes are fully implemented.

In the 1990 and 1991 curricula, the number of hours for the realization of materials for the subject Native Language and Literature was precisely specified for each thematic unit:

“About 60 percent of the hours are allocated for the field of literature, and about 40 percent for the other two of the classes for the other two, language and culture of expression. For each teaching area, the total number of hours is specified. The planned content is dealt with in 70 percent of the lessons, and the remaining 30 percent is set aside for review, practice, and systematization of the content of the programme.” (ПІОБ, 1991, p. 12)

The current grammar school curriculum also indicates the number of hours to be devoted to the teaching of literature and the number of hours to be

devoted to the teaching of language and the culture of expression, but the figures in this document are only a recommendation.⁸ We can only assume that this kind of concept is one of the reasons for the neglect of grammar content in high school teaching practice because teachers can always justify a small number of grammar hours with a recommendation from the curriculum, and since it is only a *recommendation*, they are *not obliged* to teach grammar!

A major innovation in the reformed grammar school curriculum is the order of the lessons in the document itself. In the previous curricula, the first thematic unit was *Literature*, while in the new document, it is *Language*. This change may be unexpected, considering the content of the curriculum in which more than half of the material is devoted to the teaching of literature, but it is very justified, considering the importance of learning the native language in the overall educational process of each individual, and it should have been done earlier.

Language Teaching in the Curricula of High Schools from 1990 until Today

The subject area of *Language* in high school curricula is intended to provide students with knowledge about language as a social phenomenon and language as a sign system. Within this area, elements of general linguistics, stylistics, and orthography are specified. “The goal is for students to acquire general linguistic and sociolinguistic knowledge necessary for an educated person, in addition to knowledge of their native language” (PIOB, 1991, p. 13). This programme unit is divided into several instructional topics. The 1990 first-grade language curriculum began with the section *General Concepts of Language* (in the renewed 2011 programme: *Language as a General Linguistic and Sociolinguistic Concept*). Most of the curriculum consisted of the study of the language system and the sciences that deal with it, although the *Literary Language* section was also important in many ways through which students gained knowledge of and developed appropriate attitudes toward the Serbian literary language, language policy, and language tolerance, as well as the importance of knowing literary and linguistic norms and language culture. In the part of the curriculum related to the language system, the content concerned not only the grammatical aspect

⁸ In the first and the second grade, the approximate number of hours for Language is 32, Literature 80 and Language Culture 36; in the third grade, for Language 44, Literature 80, and Language Culture 24; and in the fourth grade, for Language 30, Literature 77, and Language Culture 25. It is emphasized that “through careful planning of teaching and learning that should lead to the realization of expected outcomes in all three areas, teachers themselves determine the number of hours of instruction, while monitoring student outcomes” (IIIPIII, 2020, p. 12).

but also the functional aspect. Special importance was given to lexicology, which was the continuation of the part on word formation, which certainly contributed to the quality of the grammar school document of that time. The curriculum of that time also emphasized that:

“[t]he teaching in each lesson of the curriculum should be the continuation of the knowledge acquired by the students during their previous schooling. However, it should not be a simple repetition and revision of the previously acquired knowledge, but the overall picture of their native language and a qualitatively higher approach to the study of language organization and the laws of language.” (ПООБ, 1991, p. 13)

Compared to the 1990 first-grade language curriculum, the innovated grammar school document, whose validity was limited to two years, brought many innovations, most of which were retained in the reformed curriculum. The section on *Language as a General Linguistic and Sociolinguistic Concept* emphasised the hierarchical structure of language, economy, productivity, dislocation, and cultural transfer. The following chapter was the *Standard Language (Literary Language* in the 1990 curriculum).⁹ The next section was the *History of Literary Languages among the Serbs*. The contents of this part of the curriculum referred to the Moravian-Pannonian mission of Cyril and Methodius, to the beginnings of Slavic literacy and the types of literary languages among the Serbs until the 19th century. According to the 1990 curriculum, these contents were treated as part of the teaching of medieval literature, just as the work of Vuk Karadžić on the language and spelling reform and his lexicographic work were previously treated in the second grade as part of the Romantic era, while according to the renewed programme, they were covered in the first grade, as a part of the language teaching. Moving the aforementioned content from the *Literature* subject area to the *Language* subject area certainly represented a better solution, as it was finally placed in the thematic unit to which it inherently belongs. In the current high school curriculum, the knowledge that the students acquire about Vuk Karadžić remained in the Language curriculum, but was moved to the second grade, which relieved the burden on the curriculum, i.e., organized the proposed contents much better. The 2011 curriculum innovation was represented in the current document by Chernorizets Hrabar (*On the Letters*, orig. *Слово о њисменима*) and the *Record of Grigorije the Scribe* (orig. *Запис Григорија Дијака*) in *Miroslav's Gospel* (orig. *Мирслављево јеванђеље*). The unit titled *Language Stratification* in the current curriculum has few components and is much more general than the same topic in the previous curricula, which were more specific and richer in this segment. The author of this paper believes

⁹ The content remained the same, except that in the renewed curriculum there was no mention of the literary language variants, which were removed from the curriculum in 1992.

that this summary was not necessary, since in practice teachers can cope much easier and better if they know to what extent they have to teach specific content to students. Similarly, the topic of *Prosody* (in the earlier programs *Orthoepy*) did not have precise instructions about what students should master at that age. Earlier curricula were much more precise and produced better solutions in this area of the curriculum.

The first grade is still reserved for the studying of linguistics, phonetics with phonology and morphophonology (i.e., vowel system of the Serbian literary language and morphophonological alternations) and the basic rules of orthoepy (accent system of the Serbian standard language, unaccented length, proclitics and enclitics, etc.). In previous curricula, orthography was treated as a thematic unit in the field of *Language*, while in the latest document this content belongs mainly to *Language Culture*. Within orthography, students are trained in the use of spelling and orthography manuals and the correct use of capital letters. Unlike previous teaching topics, the content of orthography is specified in the current curriculum, which can be useful for teachers in the organizing lessons. This example should have been followed in other areas of the curriculum.

In the second grade, the teaching topic of *Standard Language* (development of the Serbian literary language in the second half of the 19th century and in the 20th century, the basic principles of the Serbian literary language standard, Ekavian and Ijekavian pronunciation, the linguistic situation in Serbia, the principles of linguistic equality and linguistic tolerance) was treated in more detail according to earlier documents. This lesson is also included in the current curriculum, only with a different title, *History of the Serbian Literary Language*. In addition, two other units are listed in the *Topics and Key Concepts of the Syllabus – Functional Styles of the Serbian Literary Language* column, and *Morphology in the Narrower Sense*. Some more specific instructions on how to implement them can be found in the *Results* column. The most accurate picture of what teachers should be teaching and to what extent is found in the *Standards* column, which explains in detail what level students will reach if they achieve a particular outcome. The functional styles of the Serbian literary language, some of which have been analysed for years as a part of teaching the language culture according to the renewed 2011 document, have been returned to the *Language* domain in the reformed curriculum.¹⁰ The area of grammar is covered in the second grade by morphology in the narrow sense and word formation.¹¹ The content on word

¹⁰ In the second grade, the knowledge of journalistic and administrative style is extended, in the third grade, of conversational style, and in the fourth grade, of literary, artistic, and scientific style, after which the distinguishing characteristics of all these styles are systematized. In the previous curriculum, the arrangement of functional styles by grade was different.

¹¹ The term *formation* was reintroduced into the text of the curriculum after 1992 when it was briefly replaced by the term *creation*.

formation, which was taught in the third grade under the 1991 curriculum, was transferred to the second grade in 2011 and was somewhat broader than before (e.g., loanwords, the relationship between compounds and semi-compounds and combined word formation were newly included). The latest document also includes more performance standards related to this linguistic discipline.¹² In the area of orthography, according to the current curriculum, students should be able to apply orthographic rules related to the spelling of abbreviations and apply basic typographic-orthographic solutions related to the printed text (spaces and print types of syllables). The latter activity is a novelty compared to previous curricula; it is extremely important for secondary school-age students, especially high school students, to be gradually introduced to the technique of writing professional and academic papers, and this requirement is very useful.

The language curriculum for the third grade in 1991 and 2011 included lexicology with elements of terminology and phraseology, as well as syntax. In addition to content related to the stylistic value of lexemes, the innovated 2011 curriculum also included content through which students gained new knowledge about the composition of the lexicon of the standard Serbian language and its origin (Serbian folk words, loanwords, Church Slavonic words), which contributed to its quality. Compared to the 1991 curriculum, the new curriculum lacked content about the most important prefixes and prefixoids, as well as suffixes and suffixoids originating from classical languages. This change has been preserved in the latest document, which is a slight relief. After the last reform of the grammar school curriculum for the Serbian language, the contents related to word formation are covered in the third grade in addition to the second grade, and this document introduces new programme units, *Stylistics* and *General Linguistics*. As far as syntax is concerned, the material is almost unchanged compared to the 1991 curriculum. Only content on full words (nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and verbs) and auxiliary words (prepositions, conjunctions, and particles) has been removed from the curriculum. Although this change does not substantially lighten the curriculum, it is justified. Requirements related to “special types of predicate sentences” that were not listed in the innovated document as they were in 1991 have been returned to the curriculum and defined more precisely (e.g., sentences with a logical subject, sentences with a passive construction, sentences with an impersonal construction). Orthography has been adapted for this grade to the transcription of words from foreign languages (a content included in previous documents), as well as to the correct use of hyphens in semi-compounds when they are in one line and when they are separated at the end of a line (an innovation compared to previous curricula).

¹² It is questionable whether such additions were necessary, since this is a very complex branch of grammar, which is already given a lot of space in elementary school. In addition, the corresponding contents in the earlier curricula of the grammar schools were sufficient.

The formal features of the current document at this grade level may confuse teachers in interpreting it. However, if one looks at the guidelines for the didactic-methodological implementation of the curriculum, one will notice that a very detailed elaboration of the teaching topics and learning outcomes is given in this section, and the fact that the recommended number of hours for each teaching unit is given is particularly significant. These recommendations can greatly assist teachers in implementing the lesson, and we believe this step in the reformed instructional document is extremely important.

Topics covered in the fourth-grade language classes included the case system, congruence, the dependent clause system, verb form, tense and mood, consecutive clause constructions and special types of independent clauses. The renewed curriculum of 2011 brought some content facilitations compared to the previous one, which was certainly a better solution for practical teaching. For example, case polyvalence, general concepts about types of independent clauses, their features and functions, basic concepts about the arrangement of syntactic units, informational updating of a sentence, communicative cohesion, pragmatics and speech acts, etc. were removed from the syllabus. Most of this content is not even mentioned in the current curriculum, except for case polyvalence, which has been reinstated. The fourth-grade language curriculum in 1991 ended with the *General Concepts of Language* section, which covered the evolution of language, the origin and development of the alphabet, multilingualism, etc. Content which was dropped from the curriculum in 2011, *Language Types: Languages of the World; Language Affinities; Language Types and Language Universals* (PIOB, 1991, p. 5), was returned to the *General Linguistics* thematic unit in the last reform, which allows students to acquire important knowledge about general linguistics and enrich their general knowledge and culture.

This arrangement of grammar material in the high school curriculum is logical and expected, so in the part of the curriculum related to linguistic content, the last reform did not require significant changes. The content adopted in elementary school is repeated in secondary school, but on a larger scale and with more complex requirements, while the priority remains on age-appropriate teaching adapted to the students' abilities, on scientificity and educability, and on correlation and integration. Therefore, it is extremely important for all grammar school language teaching not to be understood as an end in itself, but to be constantly related to the other two areas of our subject, literature and language culture, so that linguistic knowledge and the study of orthoepy and orthography contribute to the students' better and more complete acquisition of the norm of the standard language, thus improving their expressive ability.

Language Culture Teaching

Language (grammar) and speech are mutually dependent and therefore should not be considered and studied in isolation. From the multitude of different definitions of language and speech, the conclusion is that “language and speech are related to each other as something abstract (language system) and concrete (linguistic realization of the system), as general (language is a common good, property of the collective) and individual (speech is always an individual act)” (Шипка, 2008, p. 77). Language can manifest itself in two ways, orally and in writing, and knowing the rules of expression in both ways is extremely important for the development of the student’s personality.

“Researchers have found that oral language (speaking and listening) accounts for 75% of a person’s total language activity on average, and written language (writing and reading) accounts for only 25%. Man thus speaks three times more than he writes. On the contrary, in the teaching of the mother tongue and the development of language culture in general, incomparably more attention is paid to written exercises than to oral ones.” (Шипка, 2008, p. 87)

“We pay more attention to the culture of written expression than to oral expression, which can be seen from the fact that the number of research dealing with written expression far exceeds the number of research dealing with oral expression.” (Илић, 1998, p. 536)

Therefore, the responsibility of the teachers of Serbian Language and Literature in organizing the teaching of expressive language skills is extremely great; hence more attention should be paid to spoken word in the teaching practice. The solution to this unequal position of speaking in relation to writing is also complicated by the fact that the curriculum does not prescribe the number of hours devoted to one or the other, which leaves teachers free to do what they find easier in their daily work.

Speech culture can be defined as:

“[t]he personal attitude of individuals and society toward speech and language in general. It is a relationship to one’s own linguistic expression, knowledge of the qualities of good speaking [...] It is knowledge of communication, the cultivation of good speaking, and the art of using words. It is a skill of listening and an ability to observe everything that happens around us.” (Vasić, 1990, p. 62)

A developed culture of speaking is one of the ways to express the whole personality of each person. In the curricula, *Culture of Expression/Language Culture* includes content and requirements related to oral and written skills, including the implementation of various oral and written exercises, homework, and written

assignments. The oral exercises are designed to contribute to more correct articulation, diction, intonation, rhythm, and tempo in the telling of lyrical, epic, and dramatic texts and in oral presentation, while further practicing acquired skills in various forms of oral expression (e.g., reporting, debating, informing).

According to the 1990 curriculum, within the framework of *Oral Language*, students in the first grade of high school practice articulation of voices, standard accentuation, all the elements of good diction, expressive narration of memorized shorter prose and dialogue texts, and recognition and application of conversational and literary-artistic functional style. In the context of *Written Language*, in addition to marking accents and capitalization, stylistic exercises were conducted relating to shortening the text while increasing its informativeness and eliminating superfluous words and phrases. Students were required to complete a certain amount of homework and four written school assignments. The reformed curriculum, which began implementation in 2018, introduces two teaching topics in the *Language Culture, Orthography and Oral and Written Language*, which are designed to enable students to form paragraphs into meaningful units in the written essay, to craft an argumentative text both orally and in writing, and to make appropriate selections from secondary literature, journalistic texts, various encyclopaedias, and dictionaries. Another insightful suggestion given in the instructions for implementing the curriculum is that teachers should demonstrate the methods of composition writing to students in the first grade, which implies several steps: first, analysing the selected example (determining the focus of the topic, analysing the arrangement of details from the point of view of good composition, the function of paragraphs, style), then collecting material on a given topic and selecting it and finally, shaping the collected material in class and working on improving the text.¹³ Since the number of recommended instructional hours for writing assignments and their correction is four per assignment, for a total of sixteen for each year, it is clear that very few hours are left for other activities (there are only 24 recommended instructional hours for the first-grade *Language Arts* programme). The realization results in terms of other activities in this subject area are conditioned by the free and arbitrary interpretation of the teacher.

The content provided by the reformed curriculum for the second grade is not significantly changed compared to previous documents. Oral language exercises consist of describing and narrating, independent presentation as a way of interpreting literary texts or linguistic themes. New is a requirement related to a clear and concise account of the history of a book or library, as well as an introduction to essay writing, which was practiced in the fourth grade under

¹³ For the preparation of a written work, the guidelines state that “[i]t is recommended to use the Cyrillic script when preparing a written work, while the Latin script may be used when writing a revised draft” (ИПНПГ, 2020, p. 14). This advice applies to all grades.

previous curricula. In the orthography exercises, there are no requirements related to writing numbers and negative forms of verbs, but writing abbreviations is still practiced. Exercises in written language are mainly related to essay writing, i.e., improving a text, and writing a revised draft.

The content of *Language Culture* for the third grade in the current high school curriculum is not significantly different from the 1991 curriculum. Requirements such as narration and recitation of memorized literary and artistic texts and knowledge of stylistics in written language (lexical synonymy, polysemy, amplification or weakening of statements, figurative use of words), as well as extensive writing exercises related to writing in journalism (news, articles, reports, interviews, commentaries, writing presentations of literary, stage, or film work) have been dropped from the curriculum and replaced by requirements such as public performances before a larger audience, in which students should speak about issues in language, literature, and culture; then exercises in the culture of dialogue, in which students should listen to the opinions of others and take them into account in their own arguments; in active participation in public debates (preparing for a debate, presenting arguments, and drawing conclusions); and practice writing essays on a language and/or literary topic, following the principles of orthography and language norms. These changes were necessary because many studies show that today's students do not have fully functioning reading and writing skills, nor do they have sufficiently developed speaking and listening skills.

In the earlier curricula, oral language covered the concept and types of rhetoric in the fourth grade; written language instruction dealt with the use of administrative-business style (writing inquiries, complaints, business letters) and writing reviews, surveys, debates, literary parallels, and essays. All grades had instruction in reading and analysing the written homework and four written school assignments and their revision after evaluation. In addition to written homework, teachers could also assign other types of homework, oral and practical, to their students, depending on the requirements of the programme, students' abilities, and their workload in other subjects. As the analysis of the aforementioned document has shown, the content of an innovated programme in the field of *Language Culture* does not differ significantly from that of the 1991 curriculum; minor changes mainly contributed to its quality. The latest document, on the other hand, brings more significant changes, as the emphasis is no longer on the mentioned activities realized by writing different types of compositions, but on the correlation with the teaching of language and stylistics, especially in the processing of scientific functional style, and on the expansion of knowledge of orthography and the rules applied when typing a text. All of the above content has immense practical value. In general, the reformed curriculum has no significant shortcomings in the area of *Language Culture*. There are problems only in its implementation, because in our secondary schools, for the most part, the culture of expression is not given the necessary attention.

Conclusion

The analysis of the grammar school curricula for Serbian Language and Literature (the areas of *Language* and *Language Culture*) suggests that the changes made from 1990 to the present have been neither frequent nor large. There seem to be no differences in content, and most of the interventions in the curricula were related to a different arrangement of the curricular content within the grade levels, not to their scope. Extremely important to emphasize, which is the basic concept of the reformed teaching document, is the attitude that “the content of language must not be an end in itself, but rather a means to achieve the goals of education (developed language culture, functional literacy, knowledge and understanding of the language system) and, by extension, the language planning and language policy of the social community in which it is applied” (Михајловић, 2014, p. 349).

Factors influencing the need for more frequent changes in the form and content of curricula today, more than in previous years, are the development of science, engineering, and technology, the latest findings on the psychophysical development of a child and the learning process, a better connection between subject areas and the related subjects, an optimal balance between individual and social needs and goals, the need for self-education, etc. The content of the teaching theme *Language* is not subject to frequent changes, because once scientifically established, linguistic knowledge cannot be changed quickly. More susceptible to change is the approach to the given grammatical content, and in this sense the current grammar school curriculum is more focused on functional knowledge compared to earlier documents. This concept is also expressed in the area of *Language Culture*. Although the reformed high school curriculum is not sufficiently practical and organized formally, and has many inconsistencies at different grade levels, it has many positive aspects. It is focused on learning outcomes and student activities, with an extremely important recommendation to organize language learning on the basis of non-literary texts (newspapers, specialized texts, scientific-popular texts), and based in part on the analysis of conversational style, which updates the other styles in addition to literary and artistic style. The goals and objectives of teaching the Serbian Language and Literature have shifted the focus from the acquisition of knowledge to the development of various competencies of students (positive attitudes, along with knowledge, skills and values), which have greater practical value in all the segments of students' lives.

We can be satisfied with the content of *Language* and *Language Culture* provided by the current high school curriculum. Although the grammar requirements are too extensive in some units, they could be overcome if an adequate number of instructional hours were devoted to them. However, the basic problem in grammar teaching in high schools is the implementation of the

proposed material, since linguistic content is often avoided; the same applies to the content of *Culture of Expression/Language Culture*, although it is at a very low level among students. The result of all this is a large number of functionally inadequately educated high school graduates. Therefore, in the ongoing reform of high school education, more attention should be paid to these problems than to the actual content of the curriculum.

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Настава језика и језичке културе у гимназијским програмима за Српски језик и књижевност

Резиме

У раду је изложен преглед гимназијских наставних планова и програма за Српски језик и књижевност – предметно подручје Језик и Језичка култура, у периоду од 1990. године до данас. Праћени су, анализирани и упоређивани структура, задаци и садржаји програма из 1990. и 1991. године, иновираног програма из 2011. године и најновијег, реформисаног програма наставе и учења за гимназије. Циљ упоређивања докумената из назначеног периода јесте да се констатују и анализирају њихове сличности и разлике у области језика и културе говора, уче и истакну њихове позитивне и негативне стране, те да се, у складу с резултатима добијеним у истраживању, о томе донесу одређени закључци и дају предлози који би допринели њиховом даљем усавршавању.

Кључне речи: гимназија; план и програм наставе и учења; настава језика; настава језичке културе.



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