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The Programmatic Framework of Initial Reading, Writing, and Language Instruction within the Subject Macedonian Language

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Abstract: In order for students to achieve the goals set forth in the curricula for the subject Macedonian Language, the programs are structured into four or, in some cases, five thematic areas. The research focus of this paper is directed toward the examination of two of these areas: *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Language* for grades one through three. To that end, a comparative analysis is conducted between the current curricula and those established in 2007. The aim of this paper is to analyze the programmatic framework of the thematic areas *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Language*, with the overarching goal of improving the teaching of Macedonian Language. For the successful realization of the objectives and assessment standards set within these areas for grades one to three, adequate preparation, application, and classification of teaching materials are required. These materials should serve as pedagogical support both for teachers and for students, assisting them in learning the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets, practicing reading and writing, mastering linguistic and orthographic rules, and properly using punctuation marks. The study's findings indicate that the complexity of the assessment standards and the content (including conceptual scope) that students are expected to master begins to increase as early as the first grade under the new curriculum. However, this increase is not accompanied by a corresponding expansion of instructional hours allocated to the Macedonian Language subject. On the contrary, while assessment standards and content in the first grade become more demanding, the number of instructional hours decreases. This discrepancy raises questions about the feasibility of achieving the prescribed assessment standards, as formalized in the *Concept for Primary Education* adopted in 2021.

Keywords: Curricula, Initial reading and writing, Language, Analysis.

Introduction

For the successful realization of the objectives and assessment standards defined within the thematic areas *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Language* for grades one through three, appropriate preparation, implementation, and classification of teaching materials are required. These materials serve as pedagogical support not only for teachers but also for students, assisting them in learning the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets, practicing reading and writing, mastering linguistic and orthographic rules, and applying punctuation marks correctly. Therefore, it is essential to analyze the curricula, as well as the corresponding didactic and methodological design of contemporary teaching materials, which can support teachers in effectively delivering instruction in the subject Macedonian Language and help students more easily master the learning content. The curricula developed by the Bureau for Development of Education contain the objectives and assessment standards that students are expected to achieve throughout their education and upbringing.

The Significance and Role of Curricula in the Teaching of Macedonian Language

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In defining the concept of curriculum, the *Pedagogical Lexicon* (1996) provides a narrower definition, stating that “the curriculum is a document that determines the content of the teaching subjects, the scope and complexity of the knowledge and skills that students must acquire during the school year, the sequence and logic of the presentation of the prescribed material, which, in terms of volume and difficulty, must correspond to the student’s age and previously acquired knowledge.”

Similarly, the *Lexicon of Educational Terms* (2014) defines the curriculum as “a school document that determines the content, scope, and depth of education, as well as the sequence in which the subject matter is to be studied. The curriculum specifies the content for each subject. The curriculum and the syllabus are interrelated: there can be no curriculum without a syllabus, and vice versa. The scope, depth, and sequence of learning of the instructional content are the three dimensions on the basis of which the subject structure differs from the scientific disciplines upon which subjects are based. The scientific discipline is didactically transformed into a teaching subject in terms of the scope, depth, and structure of the content, thereby adapting it to the developmental differences among students. There is similarity, but not identity, between a scientific discipline and the subject content. The scope of the teaching content determines the breadth of knowledge, the quantity of facts, and the level of depth and complexity of the generalizations that students are expected to acquire. The volume of knowledge within the curriculum is organized through spatial, temporal, numerical, lexical, and other concentric circles, depending on the didactic-logical structure of the material of each subject. The spatial concentric circles refer to subjects in which the study of spatial, numerical, and lexical relations predominates.”

The structure of the curriculum determines the sequence of studying the content of individual subjects within one or several classes. There are three main methods of distributing teaching content within a curriculum: linear or sequential, concentric, and combined. In the linear or sequential arrangement, the content is distributed across one or more grades, following a topic-by-topic progression, with no return to previously covered material. In primary education, the scientific complexity of the content must be adapted to the psychological capacities of students at a given age. It is essential to distinguish between scientific simplicity and psychological simplicity: what may appear simple from a scientific perspective can be complex for students. Here lies the difference between the development of science and its internal structure, and the developmental trajectory of learners and their psychological maturity (*Lexicon of Educational Terms*, 2014).

Programmatic Area: Initial Reading and Writing

The Significance of the Thematic Area Initial Reading and Writing for the Teaching of Macedonian Language

Within the educational system of the Republic of Macedonia, insufficient attention is devoted to the methodology of handwriting. The development of neat and aesthetically pleasing writing is an individual skill that varies from person to person. With the advancement of technology and the adoption of modern trends, written forms of communication are increasingly neglected, as the process of initial writing has become automated, losing the distinctive quality and aesthetic value of well-formed lines. This circumstance highlights the crucial role of teachers in students’ linguistic literacy – that is, in teaching them to read and write – since this foundational literacy constitutes the basis for all other forms of literacy. Consequently, instruction within the thematic area *Initial Reading and Writing* represents a complex, dynamic, and particularly demanding process. Its core function is to equip students with the essential abilities to read and write.

As noted by Tomevska-Ilievska and Trajkovska (2023), “Early initial reading and writing, as an integral component of mother-tongue instruction, forms the foundation of literacy and serves as the basis for all other types of education. Upon the foundations of knowledge, skills, and habits acquired and developed through the teaching of initial reading and writing rests everything that an individual may later master across the various domains of science and art.”

Learning in school begins with the acquisition of reading and writing skills. Through continuous practice and gradual improvement, these abilities are refined until they reach a high level of automatization. Instruction in Macedonian Language is thus primarily oriented toward enabling students to read and write, upon which the overall success of the teaching process depends. For students to learn to read and write effectively, they must be motivated to explore and understand the world around them and to manage information quickly and confidently. Contemporary life imposes the necessity of acquiring literacy as early as possible so that students can interact with their environment on a new and higher level. Once students master the skills of reading and writing, they are able to participate fully in the general system of communication.

The Meaning and Development of Reading

Reading is one of the most important human activities in the modern world. The vast amount of printed material of various kinds serves as a primary source of information. However, reading certain types of texts – particularly those of an artistic nature – can provide a distinct sense of pleasure by conveying the emotions of the author. Through reading, one also achieves intellectual and educational refinement in the broadest sense of the term. Undeniably, this linguistic skill is one of the fundamental tools of learning. Therefore, a competent reader must master the technique of reading and be able to read quickly and efficiently.

Reading, as a skill cultivated within formal educational settings, may also be defined as the development of a culture of reading. This represents a broader educational aim, realized throughout the entire educational process, while the second, more specific aim relates to the acquisition of reading skills within the teaching of the mother tongue. However, as Tomevska-Ilievska (2016) notes, these two dimensions are not mutually exclusive.

The primary goal of measures related to reading is to develop reading habits and skills for rapid comprehension, to cultivate the ability for complete understanding and emotional engagement, and to enable students to use reading materials independently as reliable sources of knowledge. In 2009, Milatović identified the key values expressed through the act of reading:

Articulation. This refers to the correct pronunciation of sounds. Proper attention must be given to articulation during the early stages of reading, as it determines the future quality of reading performance. The most common error in articulation is “swallowing” sounds – typically at the end of a word – or omitting them altogether. Articulation is the fundamental prerequisite for good diction.

Diction. Diction is the correct and graceful pronunciation of words and sentences. It depends on the difficulty of the text, the speaker’s vocal abilities, and the degree of reading proficiency. Good diction requires clarity in pronunciation, grammatical stress (i.e., correct accentuation), logical emphasis, semantic emphasis (highlighting meaning within a sentence), psychological emphasis (emotional coloring), emotional intensity, and tonal variation (adjusting vocal color to suit the situation, thereby influencing the listener’s mood).

Intonation. This is the musical dimension of speech. The voice naturally adapts to the communicative situation. By raising and lowering the pitch, a reader achieves harmonious and expressive reading.

Rhythm. The alternating sequence of speech elements. The rhythm of poetry differs from that of prose, and the rhythm of a lyrical poem differs from that of an epic poem.

Tempo. Tempo refers to the duration or speed of vocalization during reading. It may vary depending on the narrative or lyrical nature of the text or on the dramatic situation. Depending on context, faster or slower reading contributes to the aesthetic quality of expression.

Pause. Pauses represent breaks in reading. They may be grammatical (indicated by punctuation marks), logical (signaling the end of a conceptual unit), or psychological (emotionally significant pauses expressing mood or tension).

Vocal Strength – Intensity. The intensity with which mood or emphasis is conveyed must be both motivated and natural, reflecting the communicative situation appropriately.

Visual Contact with the Audience. The reader must maintain visual contact with listeners, as this enables the reader to gauge audience engagement and adjust the tone and confidence of delivery accordingly.

Discretion in Gestures and Facial Expressions. Gestures and facial expressions accompany effective reading. They should be simple and natural, never artificial or incongruent with the text.

Reading remains one of the most essential human activities in contemporary life. The vast array of printed materials of different kinds serves as sources of information, yet reading certain types of texts – particularly those with artistic value that convey the emotions of their authors – can evoke a special sense of pleasure among students. Through reading, learners achieve educational and intellectual development in the broadest sense. Undoubtedly, this activity constitutes one of the fundamental means of learning (Jewell & Zintz, 1986).

The technique of reading can be continually improved. There are distinct differences between a beginner and an experienced reader. The experienced reader does not “see” individual letters but rather perceives the entire word and its meaning as a whole. With a single glance, the reader recognizes the word in its entirety along with its constituent parts, while the analytical process occurs almost simultaneously and automatically (Burns, Griffin & Snow, 1999). Thus, the experienced reader no longer focuses on reading as a mechanical activity but on the meaning of what is being read. An experienced reader reads accurately, clearly distinguishing each sound within a word and each word within a sentence. Reading is conscious and performed with comprehension. The reader understands the meaning of every sentence and the text as a whole, reading expressively in a way that evokes emotions and corresponding experiences when reading aloud.

The qualities of an experienced reader should not be developed sequentially – that is, a student should not first learn to read correctly without comprehension, then learn to understand what is being read, and only afterward add emotional expression. Modern instruction is organized to stimulate the simultaneous development of all three components – accuracy, understanding, and expressiveness – beginning in the earliest stages of reading. For example, even the highest level of artistic reading can be modeled from the very start through the teacher’s own expressive reading, which serves as a guiding example for students (Tomevska-Ilievska, 2020).

Programmatic Area: Language

The Significance of the Thematic Area Language for the Teaching of Macedonian Language

Instruction within the subject *Macedonian Language* under the thematic area *Language* is of great importance not only for the teaching of Macedonian itself but also for education as a whole. This thematic area contributes significantly to the students’ oral and written expression, as well as to the practical aspects of everyday spoken and written communication. The system of knowledge derived from grammar and orthography constitutes a key prerequisite for the linguistic culture of every individual. Without the foundational knowledge upon which the Macedonian standard language is built, it is impossible to speak meaningfully about literacy in the broader sense, even though the teaching of Macedonian Language strives toward precisely that goal.

In the first educational cycle of primary schooling, the study of grammar and orthography is not expected to be treated as a separate thematic area. Rather, it should be integrated into all other program segments – especially those involving reading texts and conducting oral and written exercises. For this reason, it is rightly emphasized that the greatest importance of grammar and orthography lies in their *practical application* within the process of spoken and written expression.

When addressing grammatical content, it is often preceded by the study of a corresponding orthographic rule – typically when correcting spelling errors observed in students’ writing, where such corrections naturally lead into the discussion of specific grammatical principles. Thus, from a methodological standpoint, the teaching of grammar and orthography should not be separated or isolated as independent areas of study. Instead, they should be taught alternately and in alignment with the activities and exercises designed for their application. Through daily care and consistent attention to the proper use of linguistic forms, students are encouraged to employ them correctly, to cultivate an appreciation for the beauty of their native language, and to discover the richness of thought that can be expressed through it. Ultimately, proper language use should contribute to the overall enhancement of students’ linguistic culture.

Research Methodology

Subject of Research

The research focus of this paper is directed toward the examination of two thematic areas – *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Language* – from the first to the third grade. To this end, a comparative analysis is conducted between the current *Curricula for the subject Macedonian Language* (2021) and those established in 2007. The objective of this study is to carry out a content-based analysis of the programmatic structure of these two thematic areas within the subject *Macedonian Language* for grades one through three, with the aim of improving the quality and effectiveness of instruction in Macedonian Language teaching. According to its methodological orientation, the study employs a *theoretical* and *empirical approach*, incorporating elements of *comparative research* and characterized primarily by a *descriptive nature*.

Research Tasks

1. To conduct a content analysis of the *Curricula for the subject Macedonian Language* from 2007 for the first, second, and third grades, focusing on the programmatic structure of the thematic areas *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Language*;
2. To conduct a content analysis of the *Curricula for the subject Macedonian Language* from 2021 for the first, second, and third grades, focusing on the programmatic structure of the thematic areas *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Language*;
3. To carry out a comparative content and structural analysis of the *Curricula for the subject Macedonian Language* from 2007 and 2021 for the first, second, and third grades, in relation to the programmatic organization of the thematic areas *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Language*.

Research Hypothesis

1. There is a need to deepen the compatibility of the objectives within the thematic areas *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Language* in the *Curricula for the subject Macedonian Language*, in order to ensure the effective implementation of instruction in the first, second, and third grades.

Technique of Pedagogical Documentation Analysis (Curricula and Syllabi)

The research includes an analysis of pedagogical documentation, specifically examining the *Curricula and Syllabi for the subject Macedonian Language* from 2007 and 2021 for the first, second, and third grades, with a particular focus on the thematic areas *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Language*.

Through this analysis of the curricula, the study identifies the content and structural organization of the thematic areas *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Language* for grades one through three, as well as the degree of compatibility in the objective framework of these programmatic areas.

Results

Analysis of the 2007 and 2021 Curricula for the Subject Macedonian Language (Grades One to Three) in the Thematic Areas *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Language*

Using the technique of pedagogical documentation analysis, this study examines the *Curricula and Syllabi for the subject Macedonian Language* for the first, second, and third grades of the first educational cycle. The analysis focuses on the thematic areas *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Language* across these grades. The results derived from the analysis of the respective curricula serve as the foundation for subsequent research segments, particularly those examining teachers' attitudes toward the implementation of instruction in the first educational cycle. They also provide a point of departure for analyzing the didactic and methodological teaching materials employed in realizing the thematic areas *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Language* within the subject *Macedonian Language*. The analysis encompasses the *Curricula for Macedonian Language* from 2007 (grades one through three) and the curricula from 2021 (grades one and two).

The curricula constitute the primary official documents upon which the planning, implementation, and assessment of student achievement throughout the academic year are based. Regarding their structure, several evident differences have been identified between the 2007 and 2021 curricula, specifically in:

- the titles of the thematic areas;
- the annual allocation of instructional hours;
- the distribution of teaching hours within individual thematic areas; and
- the structural components, namely: objectives/assessment standards, content, concepts, and activities.

The analysis of the *Curricula for Macedonian Language* from 2007 indicates that the thematic areas *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Language* were both included in the second and third grades. However, with the revisions introduced in the new curricular framework, it can be observed that the thematic area *Language* has been entirely omitted. The analysis further reveals that certain contents and concepts previously belonging to the

Language area have been differentiated and partially integrated into the thematic areas *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Listening and Speaking*.

Table 1. Comparative overview of the number of instructional hours by programmatic areas in the subject macedonian language according to the curricula

Number of Instructional Hours by Programmatic Areas							
Programmatic area	Curricula (2007)			Programmatic area	Curricula (2021)		
	I	II	III		I	II	III
Listening and Speaking	80	0	0	Listening and Speaking	70	40	/
Literature	60	0	0	Initial Reading and Writing	50	/	/
Expression and Composition	26	36	36	Literature, Expression, and Composition	50	60	/
Media Culture	20	10	10	Media Literacy and Media Culture	10	15	/
Preparation for Initial Reading and Writing	30	0	0	Reading and Writing	/	65	/
Initial Reading and Writing	0	70	70	/			/
Language	0	20	20	/			/
Reading, Literature, and Reading Book	0	80	80	/			/
Total Number of Teaching Hours	216	216	216	Total Number of Teaching Hours	180	180	/

According to the analysis of the data presented in Table 1, there is a clear reduction in the annual number of instructional hours allocated to the subject *Macedonian Language*. In the first educational cycle (grades one through three), the total number of teaching hours in the *Macedonian Language* curriculum from 2007 amounts to 216 hours. However, following the introduction of the new *Concept for Primary Education* and the corresponding revised curricula from 2021 for the first and second grades, the annual total has been reduced to 180 hours. This means that the number of instructional hours in the first and second grades for *Macedonian Language* has decreased by approximately 36%.

The analysis in this section focuses on the thematic areas *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Language*, that is, *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Listening and Speaking* – the latter now incorporating the former *Language* area from the 2007 curricula. These areas are the subject of the present research. In the 2007 curriculum for the first grade, the thematic area *Listening and Speaking* has been renamed *Listening and Communication* in the current (2021) curriculum for the same grade. Similarly, the area *Initial Reading and Writing* in the 2007 curriculum for the second grade has been renamed *Reading and Writing* in the 2021 version.

It can be concluded that, for the first grade, the total number of instructional hours allocated to the thematic area *Initial Reading and Writing* in the current curricula has increased by 9% compared to the 2007 program. Meanwhile, the analysis of the *Macedonian Language* curricula indicates that, in the first grade, the largest share of instructional time – 80 hours, or 37% of the total teaching load in 2007 – was devoted to the area *Listening and Speaking*. In the current curricula (2021), this proportion is 39%, corresponding to 70 instructional hours within the thematic area *Listening and Communication*.

According to the analysis of the 2007 *Curricula for Macedonian Language*, the thematic area *Language* in the second grade includes 20 instructional hours, or 9% of the total annual allocation, while the thematic area *Listening and Speaking* accounts for 40 hours, or 27%. It can thus be concluded that there is no significant percentage difference between the total hours allocated to these two thematic areas, which together comprise between 33% and 36% of the total teaching load.

The analysis of the overall *Macedonian Language* curriculum further indicates that, in the third grade, the largest number of instructional hours – 70 hours, or 32% of the total annual allocation – are designated for the thematic area *Initial Reading and Writing*, whereas only 20 hours, or 9%, are allocated to the thematic area *Language*.

A comparative analysis was subsequently carried out between the 2007 and 2021 curricula with respect to the instructional objectives. In the 2007 curriculum, the general goals for the entire subject are presented at the beginning of the document for each grade level. Each thematic area that follows contains specific objectives from which the instructional content and key concepts are derived.

Analysis of the current curricula (2021) reveals that, instead of general and specific goals, the documents now begin with the National Standards for Student Attainment at the End of Primary Education, covering the domains of *Language Literacy*, *Digital Literacy*, *Personal and Social Development*, *Civic and Democratic Culture*, and *Artistic Expression and Culture*. These national standards are structured into two main categories: knowledge and skills and understanding and acceptance (*National Standards for Student Attainment at the End of Primary Education*, 2021). The structure of each thematic area in the current *Macedonian Language* curricula includes *learning outcomes*, *content (and concepts)*, *assessment standards*, and *examples of activities*.

In the 2007 curriculum, the specific objectives were formulated as annual learning goals – what students were expected to achieve by the end of the school year. In the new *Concept for Primary Education*, these objectives have been reformulated as assessment standards, which are applied in both formative and summative student evaluation. Accordingly, the specific goals from the 2007 curricula should be rearticulated as performance statements to align with the principles of formative and summative assessment. Another key structural difference is that in the 2021 curricula, *content and concepts* are presented together, whereas in the 2007 curricula they appear separately, in distinct columns. In both versions, however, suggested *teaching activities* are provided as examples for implementing the instructional content.

According to the analysis of the 2007 and 2021 *Macedonian Language* curricula for the first and second grades, within the thematic area *Listening and Speaking* (or *Listening and Communication* in the current program), the process of literacy development takes place through activities that encourage students to develop interest and affection for the Macedonian language, to use spoken language for establishing new social contacts and mutual understanding, to practice active listening and comprehension, to coordinate and properly apply verbal and nonverbal communication, and to express emotions, experiences, opinions, and thoughts freely.

In the current curriculum, students are expected to acquire the ability to retell, narrate, and describe orally, using various types of sentences – interrogative, declarative, affirmative, and negative – and to achieve correct speech articulation. Furthermore, students are expected to learn how to discover the meanings of new words and apply them in new contexts, to distinguish sounds and phonemes according to specific characteristics, to pronounce them correctly, to group words appropriately, and to divide words into syllables correctly. In the second grade, according to the 2007 curriculum, students began learning numbers up to 20 as a part of the word categories, whereas in the current curriculum, numbers up to 100 and ordinal numbers up to 10 are studied within the thematic area *Reading and Writing*.

There are noticeable differences in the content and conceptual structure between the 2007 and 2021 curricula in the thematic areas *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Reading and Writing*. It should be noted that the current *Macedonian Language* curriculum for the first grade largely corresponds to the 2007 curriculum for the second grade. In the 2007 first-grade curriculum, students were introduced to the basic linguistic concepts of *sentence*, *word*, and *sound*; they explored the characteristics of writing, practiced fine-motor coordination (eye-hand coordination), recognized whole words, and identified uppercase printed letters. In contrast, the new curricular framework introduces early reading already in the first grade, through the contents *Initial Reading 1* (reading words) and *Initial Reading 2* (reading complete texts). Students also begin early writing – learning printed, lowercase, and uppercase letters, as well as punctuation marks (period, question mark, exclamation point) – and study the entire Macedonian alphabet. This confirms that the current first-grade curriculum corresponds to the 2007 second-grade program, as both include the acquisition of graphic symbols (printed letters) of the Macedonian Cyrillic script, mastery of uppercase and lowercase printed letters, capitalization at the beginning of sentences, and writing of personal names. They also include learning to write cursive letters, both uppercase and lowercase, through individual letter formation. In the current (2021) *Macedonian Language* curriculum for the second grade, students are expected to read and comprehend words, sentences, and short texts; to write lowercase and uppercase cursive letters of the Macedonian alphabet correctly; to apply them accurately in word and sentence writing; to use punctuation marks appropriately; and to apply the rule for transferring one syllable from a two-syllable word to the next line.

An analysis of the 2007 *Macedonian Language* curriculum for the third grade reveals that the contents and objectives in the thematic areas *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Language* become increasingly complex. Within the area *Initial Reading and Writing*, students are introduced to the Latin alphabet and acquire the ability to read

and write words and texts using both printed and cursive Latin letters. Meanwhile, in the *Language* area, previously acquired knowledge from earlier grades is reinforced – this includes sentence types (declarative, interrogative, exclamatory, affirmative, and negative), word, syllable, and sound recognition, and the use of punctuation marks. Following this reinforcement, the learning objectives expand to include introductory grammar instruction: recognizing and distinguishing between common and proper nouns, identifying gender and number in nouns, understanding adjectives and verbs, and learning both cardinal and ordinal numerals. The progression of learning objectives follows a consistent pedagogical principle – from simpler toward more complex content.

The findings from this segment of the research indicate that the increasing complexity of assessment standards and instructional content (including conceptual material) begins as early as the first grade under the current curriculum. However, this rising complexity is not accompanied by an increase in the total number of instructional hours allocated to the subject *Macedonian Language*. On the contrary, while assessment standards and content expectations in the first grade have become more demanding, the number of instructional hours has decreased. This situation raises questions about the feasibility of achieving the prescribed assessment standards and the degree to which they can be meaningfully formalized within existing curricular constraints.

Conclusions

According to the data obtained from the theoretical and comparative part of the research, in which the *Curricula* from 2007 and 2021 for the subject *Macedonian Language* for the first, second, and third grades were analyzed, regarding the thematic areas *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Language*, it is established that there is a need to deepen the compatibility of the set objectives within the thematic areas *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Language*. Supporting this conclusion is the comparative approach applied in analyzing the *Curricula* that were in use from 2007 until 2021 and the current *Curricula* that derive from the *Concept for Primary Education*.

This research approach is justified precisely because of the central research problem established in this scholarly study. An additional research challenge arises from the fact that, in the current *Curricula*, the thematic area *Language* is not separately defined in the first and second grades, as was the case in the previous “generation” of *Curricula*. Given the importance of the *Language* area, this study, through an analysis of the *Curricula*, identifies the objectives and contents – some of which are now integrated into other thematic areas.

From the analysis of the 2007 *Curricula*, it can be concluded that the thematic areas *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Language* were included in the second and third grades. With the changes introduced by the *Concept for Primary Education*, it is evident that the *Language* area has been completely omitted. The analysis indicates that certain contents and concepts from the *Language* area have been differentiated and integrated into the thematic areas *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Listening and Speaking*.

According to the 2007 *Curricula*, the *Language* area in the second grade included 20 instructional hours, or 9% of the total annual load, while *Listening and Speaking* comprised 40 hours, or 27%. It can therefore be concluded that there is no significant percentage difference between these two thematic areas, which together account for between 33% and 36% of the total number of instructional hours.

The data analysis further shows a clear reduction in the total annual number of instructional hours allocated to the subject *Macedonian Language*. In the first educational cycle (grades one through three), the number of teaching hours according to the 2007 *Curricula* amounted to 216 hours, whereas in the revised *Curricula* for the first and second grades, the annual total is reduced to 180 hours.

It is evident that the number of instructional hours for the first grade in the thematic area *Initial Reading and Writing* has increased in the current *Curricula* compared to the 2007 *Curricula*. However, the analysis of the *Macedonian Language* curricula shows that in the first grade the largest share of instructional time – 80 hours, or 37% of the total number of teaching hours – is allocated to the thematic area *Listening and Speaking*, that is, 70 hours or 39% in the corresponding area *Listening and Communication* according to the current *Curricula*.

The overall analysis of the *Macedonian Language* curriculum further indicates that, in the third grade, the greatest number of teaching hours – 70 hours, or 32% of the total annual allocation – are devoted to the thematic area *Initial Reading and Writing*, while only 20 hours, or 9%, are allocated to the thematic area *Language*.

Based on the conducted analysis, it can be concluded that there is a need to deepen the compatibility of the objectives within the thematic areas *Initial Reading and Writing* and *Language* (even though *Language* is no

longer defined as a separate thematic area). Such alignment is necessary for the effective implementation of *Macedonian Language* instruction in the first, second, and third grades, thereby confirming the research hypothesis.

The final conclusions indicate that a revision of the *Curricula* for the subject *Macedonian Language* from the first to the third grade is necessary in the future, with particular emphasis on re-examining the representation of the objectives and teaching contents that fluctuate within the thematic area *Language* (noting that *Language* is not included as a separate thematic area in the current *Macedonian Language* curricula for the first and second grades). At the same time, the revision of the *Curricula* should aim to reassess the scope and intensity of the assessment standards set within the thematic area *Initial Reading and Writing* for the first and second grades, bearing in mind that a considerable portion of the content previously belonging to the *Language* area has been integrated into *Initial Reading and Writing*, even though the number of instructional hours in this area has increased by 9% in the current programs.

It should also be taken into account that the instructional and cognitive load associated with *Initial Reading and Writing* in the second grade under the 2007 curriculum has now been fully transferred to the first grade in the current curriculum. The ultimate conclusion points to the need for a comprehensive revision and the development of new *Curricula* for the subject *Macedonian Language* for the first, second, and third grades of primary education in the Republic of Macedonia.

Scientific Ethics Declaration

* The authors declare that the scientific ethical and legal responsibility of this article published in EPESS journal belongs to the authors.

* Ethical approval is not required for this study.

Conflict of Interest

* The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest

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