



ORIGINAL PAPER

Romanian as a Foreign Language in Post-Communist Romania

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Abstract

Following the collapse of the communist regime, Romania entered a process of globalisation which has greatly influenced many sectors of life, including education. For over 30 years now, researchers, institution leaders and organisations have addressed the issue of the internationalisation of higher education. In this context, an increasing number of foreign students is attracted by the study programmes and courses offered by Romanian universities. Some of these courses are available in foreign languages, but most of them are in Romanian, hence the growing demand for teaching and learning Romanian as a foreign language. The aim of this paper is to analyse the major components of internationalisation and their impact on higher education in Romania, focusing on the latest development of the study programme called *The Romanian Language Preparatory Year (Anul pregătitor de limba română)*. As a method, we resort to official facts and figures to analyse how the main strategies of internationalisation have been implemented into the Romanian higher education system. Our research concludes that the preparatory year instills international, global, and comparative dimensions not only in the classroom, but in the entire academic life, leading to a higher respect and tolerance for other nations, cultures and life-styles.

Keywords: *higher education; internationalisation; multiculturalism; Romanian language; teaching.*

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Introduction

The end of the communist regime in Romania was followed by the opening of borders, both political and cultural, which inscribed the country into a process of globalisation. A widely-spread, yet controversial term, “globalisation”, has given rise to numerous ideological debates. Our discussion, for the purpose of this article, adopts a nonideological point of view, and starts from Jane Knight’s perspective on globalisation as “the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values, and ideas... across borders”. (Knight, 2015: 3) As Knight points out, each country is affected differently, depending on its historical background, culture, traditions and priorities.

Globalisation, with its range of challenges and opportunities, has a great impact on education. For over 30 years now, researchers, institution leaders and organisations have addressed the issue of the internationalisation of higher education. But what does this mean? First of all, many different terms have been used in connection with the international dimension of higher education, such as “global studies”, “international studies”, “intercultural education”, “multicultural education”, “transnational education”, “borderless” or “cross-border education”, “education abroad”, “academic mobility”, etc. The most commonly used definition of the process of internationalisation is the one formulated by Jane Knight in 1994: “a process of integrating an international and cultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution.” (Knight, 2008: 19). It is clear that, since the 1990s, the international dimension of higher education has grown and gained broader attention due to the new realities and changes brought forth by globalisation: the advent of information and communications technology, the increasingly integrated world economy, the role of the English language, and so on. As internationalisation impacts higher education, globalisation impacts internationalisation. Starting from this assumption, Knight has updated her definition: “Internationalization at the national sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education.” (Knight, 2015: 2) By “purpose” she means the “role and objectives that higher education has for a country or the mission of an institution”; “functions” include the primary elements of a national or institutional postsecondary system, such as “teaching, research, and service to society”; “delivery” refers to the education programmes and courses offered by higher education institutions or multinationals. (Knight, 2015: 3). The process of internationalisation has two major components: one is internationalisation at home, the other is internationalisation abroad (Knight, 2008: 22-24). In what follows, we shall see what these components refer to, what kind of activities they involve, and how Romanian universities have adapted to these latest trends in higher education. This study will highlight the unprecedented importance and development of Romanian as a foreign language in the context of the internationalisation of higher education.

Internationalisation of Romanian higher education: facts and figures

Internationalisation abroad refers to all forms of education across borders: “mobility of students and faculty, and mobility of projects, programs and providers” (Wit, 2010: 9). Nowadays, mobility, as the main feature of the process of internationalisation, is widely spread. We are now going to scrutinise four forms of mobility which are relevant to the process of internationalisation in Romania: international credit mobility; full degree mobility; staff mobility; other types of short-term mobility.

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International credit mobility (“short-term mobility”), facilitated by the Erasmus programme, enables students or doctoral candidates to study abroad for a short period of time (three to twelve months), to obtain credits, and then to return to their sending institutions in order to complete their studies. In Romanian higher education, there are both incoming students, i.e. foreign students who have a short mobility in Romania, and outgoing students, i.e. Romanian students who study abroad under international credit mobility. In 1998 Romania joined CEEPUS (Central European Exchange Program for University Studies) and, according to the *Report on the State of Higher Education in Romania* in the academic year 2017-2018, published by the Ministry of National Education, 422 scholarships were offered to incoming students, most of them being from Slovakia, Serbia and Hungary, while 561 outgoing students received scholarships to study mainly in Hungary, Austria and Slovakia.

The full degree mobility (“long term mobility”) gives students the possibility to complete a full cycle of studies (Bachelor, Master, or Doctoral Programme) in a foreign country. In Romania, the number of incoming students, who are internationally mobile for a whole study programme, is constantly rising. Thus, according to the same *Report*, in 2018, the foreign students who were studying in Romania represented 6.1% from the total number of public university students (7,759 students from 28 EU and EES countries, and 21,085 students from 99 non-EU countries). The great majority of the incoming students were enrolled in undergraduate programmes. Judging by the statistical figures of the previous years, the number of foreign students is steadily increasing in public universities, and is relatively stable in private higher education institutions.

Table 1. The evolution of the number of students enrolled in Bachelor degree programmes, on forms of property

	Number of students			Rate by country	
	Total	Romanian students	Foreign students	Romanian students	Foreign students
Academic year 2014/2015					
Total	411,229	389,545	21,684	94.7%	5.3%
Public	345,336	326,105	19,231	94.4%	5.6%
Private	65,893	63,440	2,453	96.3%	3.7%
Academic year 2015/2016					
Total	410,697	388,110	22,587	94.5%	5.5%
Public	351,450	330,873	20,577	94.1%	5.9%
Private	59,247	57,237	2,010	96.6%	3.4%
Academic year 2016/2017					
Total	405,638	381,952	23,686	94.2%	5.8%
Public	350,149	328,593	21,556	93.8%	6.2%
Private	55,489	53,359	2,130	96.2%	3.8%
Academic year 2017/2018					
Total	408,179	383,364	24,815	93.9%	6.1%
Public	352,299	329,531	22,768	93.5%	6.5%
Private	55,880	53,833	2,047	96.3%	3.7%

Source: *Report on the State of Higher Education in Romania (Raport privind starea învățământului superior din România) 2017/2018*, Ministry of National Education, 2018: 10.

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Out of the 24,815 foreign students enrolled in the academic year 2017-2018, 14,670 came from third countries (non-EU and not part of the European Economic Area and the Swiss Confederation) to study on their own expense, paying the tuition fees set by each university.

The most attractive study fields for a third of the non-EU students were general medicine, dental medicine and pharmacy. These domains are mainly required by students from Israel, the Republic of Moldova, Tunisia, Syria, Morocco, Lebanon, Albania, Jordan, and Iran. According to the above mentioned report, a third of the EU students came from France, and three quarters of the EU and EES students also chose a medical field of study.

If before 1989 the influx of foreign students was insured by Arab and African countries that had a strong ideological connection to Ceaușescu's regime, the present-day foreign students are attracted by the quality of Romanian study programmes and their affordable price. In the field of medicine, for instance, the education offer is comparable to that of more prestigious universities in the West, but at considerably lower prices. At the same time, after successfully completing their study programmes, foreign students receive a diploma that gives them the right to practise medicine, stomatology, or pharmacy in any of the European Union countries.

Regarding staff mobility, which refers to both teaching and non-teaching staff, this is also an important component of internationalisation. John Hudzik points out that: "Mobile students without mobile faculty and staff creates dissonance in the attempt to internationalize. Unless faculty and staff are mobile, connections to what happens abroad to students and what happens to them on campus will be weak." (Hudzik, 2011: 9) In Romania, much of the external mobility is enabled by European programmes such as Erasmus+ and CEEPUS. The above mentioned report indicates that, under Erasmus+, 3,716 university staff members benefitted from teaching or training mobility in 2017, the number growing to 4,200 in 2018, which led to a general rate of fund absorption of 98.8%.

Other types of short-term mobility include programmes such as international summer schools, or international conferences where teachers or researchers are invited as keynote speakers. According to the data presented in the *Report on the State of Higher Education in Romania*, in June-July 2018, 70 foreign students registered for the Summer Courses in Romanian language, culture and civilization, organised by West University Timișoara, "A.I. Cuza" University of Iași, University of Craiova, and Ovidius University of Constanța, under bilateral agreements with 14 states: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, China, Croatia, Greece, Italy, the Russian Federation, Portugal, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey, and Vietnam. The Department of Modern Foreign Languages, University of Craiova, has been the organiser of "Constantin Brâncuși" Summer Courses since 2013, when the courses were resumed after a break of several years. In July 2019, the department welcomed 13 students from Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, and Turkey.

The large presence of foreign students enrolled in different study programmes has prompted Romanian universities to embrace an international dimension of the academic life, or, in other words, to create the framework for internationalisation at home. John Hudzik explains how this process impacts higher education: "comprehensive internationalisation is a commitment, confirmed through action, to infuse international and comparative perspectives throughout the teaching, research, and service missions of higher education. It shapes institutional ethos and values and touches the entire higher education enterprise. It is essential that it be embraced by institutional leadership, governance, faculty, students, and all academic service and support units. It is an institutional imperative, not just a desirable possibility." (Hudzik, 2011: 6)

A strategic approach to internationalisation at home should take into consideration the following components:

- the number of local and international students enrolled;
- the number of programmes or courses taught in a foreign language;
- the number of teachers trained to teach their subjects in a foreign language;
- the number of foreign teachers involved in teaching and/or research;
- redesigning the curricula and the content of courses;
- teaching in a foreign language;
- academic facilities;
- support services, especially for international students;
- extracurricular activities designed to enhance the international exposure of students in campuses;
- improvement of future employment/career prospects.

The pressure on universities to raise their global profile has led to the increasing importance of foreign languages; hence, students are encouraged and enabled to develop multilingual and intercultural knowledge and skills.

Romanian language in the process of internationalisation

Mastering a foreign language is the main requirement for the success of internationalisation, not only abroad, but also at home. In order to set up study programmes in a foreign language to attract incoming students, universities must rely on academic staff and students who can speak that language. Moreover, linguistic competences facilitate access to international learning sources and databases, and give individuals the possibility to apply for a learning, teaching, training or research mobility.

After 1989, Romanian universities were quick to respond to these linguistic needs, and the study of at least one foreign language has become compulsory in all academic programmes for the past 30 years. At the same time, a series of universities have introduced whole study programmes where teaching is conducted in English, French, or German, and both Romanian and foreign students can benefit from these opportunities. However, the number of “degree mobile” students exceeds the study places offered in these programmes, or, as it is often the case, foreign students are interested in programmes that are not taught in foreign languages, hence, the need to study Romanian.

This context was favourable to the development of the studies in Romanian as a foreign language which have a long tradition, dating back to the 18th century: “Teaching Romanian as a foreign language was prefigured in *Elementa linguae daco-romanae sive valachicae*, the work of Samuil Micu and Gheorghe Șincai, which was published in Vienna in 1780, and, in the following 200 years, was approached more or less programmatic. In the last decades of the 20th century, as a direct result of a favourable politico-economic situation, teaching Romanian as a foreign language entered a phase of maximum development.” (Moldovan, 2012: 9, my translation)

As we mentioned earlier, the communist regime welcomed students from “friend” countries in Africa and the Arab world. As Victoria Moldovan points out, this political decision, backed by the communists’ ideological reasons and economic purposes, had positive linguistic consequences as it raised the specialists’ interest in approaching Romanian language from the perspective of a foreign language (Moldovan, 2012: 9). The research area, belonging to the field of applied linguistics, attained significance in the 1970s. Reputed linguists such as Marius Sala, Mioara Avram, Ion Coteanu, Boris Cazacu, Tatiana Slama-Cazacu, Maria Iliescu, Flora Șuteu were interested in this field, and encouraged the applied research of Romanian language.

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Higher education promptly reacted to that new trend in linguistic research and to the needs of foreign students, and thus Romanian language began to be extensively taught in universities.

After Romania signed the Bologna Declaration in 1999, and later joined the European Union, Romanian language has gained visibility, and has become increasingly more attractive to linguists and to professionals in multicultural communication, such as interpreters, translators, or business men. Internationalisation, as discussed above, has further contributed to the development of Romanian as a foreign language since more and more long-term mobile students need to first learn the language, and then register for their specific study programmes. The official site of the Ministry of National Education states that foreigners are enrolled in higher education study programmes in Romanian only after graduating from the preparatory year, during which they acquire knowledge of language, as well as specific knowledge related to the profile of their future training (anatomy, physics, chemistry, drawing, etc.). The duration of preparatory studies is one academic year for undergraduate studies, and at least six months for Master studies, doctoral studies and postgraduate medical residency.

In 2018, through ministerial order, the legal framework was created to allow the accreditation of the study programmes related to the preparatory year for foreign students. Thus, starting with the academic year 2018-2019, the preparatory year, for the candidates who wish to enrol in study programmes taught in Romanian, is organised in higher education institutions that are accredited, following an evaluation by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Today, there are 27 accredited universities which organise one-year preparatory courses in Romanian language.

Being designed for international students, the preparatory year becomes a linguistic support, and also a distinctive feature of the process of internationalisation at home in Romanian higher education. At the same time, the teaching of Romanian as a foreign language has to adapt to the requirements of this process. Hans de Wit explains that: “Under the impetus of the ‘internationalisation at home movement’ the attention has become more focused on the internationalisation of the curriculum and the teaching and learning process...” (Wit, 2010: 9-10). After the fall of communism, preparatory year teachers had easy access to new trends in language methodology, and since then they have paid tremendous effort to implement modern approaches in the Romanian studies, which meant updating the curriculum, the teaching materials and the teaching methods.

Developments in teaching Romanian as a foreign language

Before 1989, the materials used for teaching Romanian as a foreign language focused mainly on grammar and the acquisition of grammatical structures. A great number of grammar books, collections of grammar exercises, and bilingual dictionaries were published.

During the 1960s and 1970s, there appeared numerous conversation guides, such as *Guide de conversation français-roumaine. Ghid de conversație francez-român*, (*French-Romanian Conversation Guide*) written by Silvia Kerim, and published in Bucharest, in 1966. In the same period, universities encouraged the publication of course books to satisfy the learning needs of an increasing number of foreign students. For example, at the University of Bucharest, Adriana Ionescu, Melania Florea and Ioana

Boroianu, published in 1968 *Manualul de limba română pentru studenții străini* (*Course Book of Romanian Language for Foreign Students*).

The course books written in the 1980s began to approach language from more modern teaching perspectives. A reference publication from those years remains *Limba română. Manual pentru studenții străini* (*Romanian Language. Course book for Foreign Students*), published in 1981 by Grigore Brâncuș, Adriana Ionescu and Manuela Saramandu, from the University of Bucharest. This book, conceived on large methodological principles, combined modern and traditional approaches to language learning, aiming at “a simultaneous acquisition of language compartments: phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, phraseology” (Brâncuș, 2003: 3). Edited five times, this course book remains a valuable teaching material due to the fact that grammatical structures are very well explained and organised.

The end of communism enabled teachers’ access to the latest trends in language teaching methodology, and the results were quick to appear. Thus, the course books published in the 1990s, no longer relied solely on image and text, but came with audio tapes, as it was the case of Liana Pop’s second edition of *Româna cu sau fără profesor. Le roumain avec ou sans professeur. Romanian with or without a teacher*, published in 1993 in Cluj-Napoca. After 2000, the audio tapes were replaced by CDs and CD-ROMs.

Technological innovations gave teachers the possibility to use recorded materials in their teaching, and to design a wide range of listening related tasks, which meant that all four language skills (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) could be worked on and improved in the Romanian language class. Universities, in their turn, soon understood the importance of adding the audio dimension to language classes, and provided language departments with multimedia laboratories. Teachers can now record their own materials, such as songs, TV news, advertisements, etc.; they can record students and group work activities, and use the recordings for feedback purposes and further learning. Videos can also be valuable teaching tools, and on the internet there are various short films and documentaries in Romanian that can be used in class for teaching purposes. Browsing the Internet has become not only a daily pastime activity for learners and teachers alike, but also a means of improving language skills. It can be used as a reference source since, for instance, good Romanian dictionaries or encyclopaedias are available online. Students can read articles on virtually any topic; therefore, almost any site can offer a valuable language input.

These new teaching aids, provided by audio/video materials and the Internet, have broadened the horizon of Romanian teaching in an unprecedented way, and have also given the study programme of the preparatory year an international dimension. It may be worth mentioning that universities in Romania have invested much in technology, facilitating students’ access to virtual learning resources and encouraging their interaction with the teaching staff members. John Hudzik underlines the importance of technology in the process of internationalisation: “The use of technology in higher education has the capacity to make the world a virtual campus and blurs the notion of a campus as being in a particular place and an institution as being only in a particular geographic location. In these ways, the globalization of higher education provides a non-campus based frame of reference or context for internationalization.” (Hudzik, 2011: 9).

In the era of global communication and unlimited access to information, the traditional paradigm of instruction had to be replaced by a more holistic approach. The curricular reform and the revision of course contents have been backed by a rethinking

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of the methodology used in language teaching and learning. If before 1989 the focus was on grammatical accuracy, nowadays fluency is considered far more important. Many course books are currently designed from the perspective of Communicative Language Teaching, a methodology that became popular around the world in the 1970s, marking a significant shift in second language education.

According to this methodology, students need the right skills to communicate in the target language; hence, great emphasis is placed on communicative activities, such as: dialogues, debates, games, role-plays, etc., which require the use of both linguistic structures and language functions. This kind of activities were virtually absent from the teaching materials produced during communism. Encouraging students to speak has clear advantages:

- Romanian ceases to be solely the object of study, and becomes a vehicle for classroom communication. This aspect is very important for the preparatory year where the groups consist of students who speak different languages and belong to different cultures.
- The focus shifts from linguistic forms to language functions. One function, such as inviting or requesting, can be expressed by several linguistic forms which are presented together. Grammar and vocabulary derive from the function and the situational context.
- Language is practised in real-life contexts. For this purpose, teachers select or devise activities that engage the learner in meaningful and authentic language use. Thus, students have the possibility to build the communicative skills they need to perform in the world outside the classroom.
- Since teachers devote more time than in the past to teaching elements of phonology, communicative activities provide the right setting for learners to practise their pronunciation and intonation. Consequently, students acquire the skills they need in order to make themselves understood, and also to understand words in connected speech.
- Students are encouraged to express their opinions and feelings, a fact meant to boost their self-confidence, and also their learning motivation. If their voice is heard, then they will feel valued not only in relation to their Romanian language performance, but also as individuals and representatives of their cultures. Critical thinking in a multicultural classroom is essential. Exposing students to more than one cultural viewpoint on a given topic leads them to a better understanding of that topic. At the same time, critical thinking creates less prejudicial behaviour and greater empathy among students.
- Communicative activities are based on pair or group work; therefore, the emphasis is on student-student interaction. In the preparatory year, these activities also help students overcome cultural differences and build personal relationships based on mutual understanding and tolerance.
- The teacher acts as a facilitator who sets up communicative activities and as an advisor during those activities. He/she does not intervene much in students' dialogues, and the mistakes are recorded and corrected some time after the activity.

Teachers' endeavour to keep up with the latest trends in language teaching methodology represents a major shift in Romanian language education. This shift "is aided by the appearance of global ranking schemes, the search for common standards, and the creation of multilateral policies that break down impediments to the flow of

faculty, students, collaborative education (e.g., joint degrees), and joint research.” (Hudzik, 2011: 9)

The entire process of learning, teaching and assessing Romanian is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages that describes what learners need to study in a language course in order to use that language for communicative purposes. The Common European Framework also presents the knowledge and skills that learners must acquire and develop in order to be linguistically efficient. The description takes into account the cultural context which constitutes the base of a language. Finally, the Common European Framework clearly defines the levels of linguistic competence, which enable learners’ performance to be measured at any stage during the learning process and at any stage in life. By offering a common reference base, which comprises extensive descriptions of objectives, content, and methods, the framework grants transparency to courses, study programmes and qualifications, enabling thus the international cooperation in the field of modern languages.

In higher education, Romanian language is taught in accordance with the fundamental principles described in the framework, and at the same time each course takes into consideration the learners’ needs, motivations, particularities, resources and cultural heritage. In the last years, course books of Romanian as a foreign language have been designed according to the levels of language proficiency agreed internationally (see Platon, El., Sonea, I., Vilcu, D., 2012, *Manual de limba română ca limbă străină A1-A2 / Coursebook of Romanian as a Foreign Language A1-A2*, Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință; Bălănescu, O., 2019, *Limba română ca limbă străină. Nivel B1-B2 / Romanian as a Foreign Language. Level B1-B2*, Craiova: Sitech). Course book contents reflect the linguistic requirements of each proficiency level, yet these contents may be altered in class, depending on the analysis of the learning/teaching situation of each group of students. It is the teacher who, starting from such an analysis, sets the course objectives and chooses the right way to achieve those objectives.

The Romanian teacher in the preparatory year has numerous tasks and responsibilities: professional, institutional, or personal. Apart from the traditional roles of activity controller, organiser, assessor, prompter, observer, participant, resource, or tutor, the teacher is also an ‘initiator’. For the foreign students, the preparatory year represents their first contact with the essence of Romanian culture which is the language. Studying Romanian becomes, in this context, the first and the most important step in their integration into the Romanian society, where they will have to function for a long time. As Ulrich Teichler points out: “Student mobility is by no means viewed as beneficial only in regard to academic progress as well as to subsequent employment and work of graduates. Rather, mobility during the course of study is likely to affect the whole personality and the subsequent life of formerly mobile students.” (Teichler, 2017: 204-205) From this perspective, the Romanian language teacher has a major role in these young people’s cultural and professional training. Language teaching crosses the borders of subject knowledge which must be taught and acquired; it impacts individuals and shapes their emerging personalities.

Teachers of Romanian as a foreign language are also involved in promoting the language and culture abroad; in so doing, they continue a tradition which began in 1863, when the first Romanian departments/ lectureships were established: one in Torino and one in Budapest. Since 1999, the Romanian Language Institute has coordinated the activity of an increasing number of lectureships (over 40 today) which offer language classes and promote Romanian higher education in universities around the world. It is

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one more instance of higher education internationalisation to which Romanian language greatly contributes.

Conclusion

Since 1989 Romanian universities, aided by the Ministry of National Education and the Government, have made tremendous efforts to integrate and infuse international dimensions into the ethos and outcomes of higher education, and to involve the academic community in global networks and partnerships.

The preparatory year for Romanian language is one of the best examples of internationalisation: it welcomes large numbers of students every year; the teaching approach is in line with the methodology used in language studies worldwide, with an emphasis on communicative tasks and activities; the curriculum and course contents have been revised as to provide learners with the competences (knowledge, skills, attitudes) which enable them to meet the challenges of communication across language and cultural boundaries; learners' performance is assessed according to the levels of linguistic competence described by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. At the end of the day, perhaps the most valuable contribution that the preparatory year brings to the internationalisation of higher education remains the plurality of vision, the multicultural stamp that it puts on Romanian studies, and the academic life on the whole.

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