



ORIGINAL PAPER

Utilising Elements of Art and Literature in Teaching Romanian Culture

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Abstract :

Art and literature play a crucial role in cultural education, offering profound insights into national identity, values, and traditions. This paper explores the integration of prominent artistic and literary works in teaching Romanian culture to foreign learners. By incorporating visual arts, poetry, prose, and historical narratives, educators can provide a multidimensional understanding of Romania's cultural landscape. The study highlights best practices in selecting and adapting artistic materials for different proficiency levels, fostering intercultural competence, and enhancing student engagement. Case studies illustrate how literature by Eminescu or sculptures by Brâncuși can facilitate a deeper appreciation of Romanian heritage. The paper argues that a well-structured fusion of art and literature in cultural education not only improves linguistic skills but also nurtures critical thinking and cultural sensitivity.

Keywords: *Romanian as a second language, teaching Romanian language, culture, art, literature, foreign students.*

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Introduction

Culture is not simply a backdrop to language, it is its pulse, its rhythm, its atmosphere. In language education, particularly for foreign learners, culture must be taught not as static fact, but as dynamic, lived experience. Romanian culture, with its rich interplay of Eastern and Western influences, offers fertile ground for a teaching approach grounded in the arts. Literature and visual art provide more than illustrative content; they act as windows into Romanian thought, history, values, and emotional landscapes.

Romanian poets, playwrights, sculptors, and painters have long interpreted and reshaped the country's identity. Their works, whether through lyrical contemplation, bold political commentary, or abstract form, allow learners to access Romania's cultural imagination across centuries. By integrating these materials into language and cultural education, instructors can engage students at both intellectual and emotional levels, helping them move beyond surface-level cultural knowledge to a deeper, more embodied understanding.

This paper explores how educators can meaningfully utilise elements of art and literature in teaching Romanian culture, particularly to foreign language learners. The discussion is anchored in educational theory and supported by examples from practice. It addresses the importance of selecting level-appropriate materials, the pedagogical advantages of artistic and literary integration, and the role such approaches play in developing not only language proficiency but also cultural empathy and critical awareness.

The Role of Literature in Cultural Immersion

Literature is often the most intimate and enduring expression of a culture's inner life. Unlike textbooks or formal instructional materials, literary texts offer access to the textures of thought, emotion, and historical consciousness that shape a national identity. They act as vessels of memory and imagination, capturing the rhythms of speech, the dilemmas of society, and the aspirations of individuals situated within particular times and places. For learners encountering Romanian culture, literature serves not simply as a medium for language acquisition but as a portal into a complex and evolving cultural landscape.

Romanian literature is particularly rich in its capacity to reflect national identity, not only through thematic content but also through its linguistic and stylistic innovations. It encompasses a wide range of voices, from Romantic nationalism and political satire to postmodern fragmentation and post-communist introspection. Each literary period offers a different lens on Romania's cultural evolution, making literature an ideal tool for introducing students to both the diachronic development of Romanian society and the synchronic diversity of its perspectives.

At the center of any literary approach to Romanian cultural education stands Mihai Eminescu. Often described as the soul of Romanian poetry, Eminescu exemplifies how literature can express a collective emotional and philosophical identity. His poetry reflects the Romantic spirit of the 19th century, infused with metaphysical exploration and national symbolism. In works such as *The Morning Star (Luceafărul)* and *I Have One More Longing (Mai am un singur dor)*, Eminescu marries elevated poetic diction with universal themes, unattainable love, spiritual longing, mortality, and cosmic order, anchored in distinctly Romanian imagery and idioms. His verses are not only aesthetically refined but also culturally saturated, making them a powerful means of immersing learners in the national ethos.

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When introduced to students, Eminescu's work becomes more than a reading exercise; it becomes an encounter with a cultural archetype. Even simplified or bilingual versions retain the emotional resonance and philosophical complexity of the original. In a classroom context, *The Morning Star* offers layered opportunities for exploration: on the surface, it can be discussed as a tragic love story between a celestial being and a mortal girl; on a deeper level, it provokes questions about identity, time, and the limitations of human desire. Through such analysis, students are not only improving their reading comprehension and vocabulary, but also developing interpretive skills and cultural literacy. Engaging with the poem's symbolism, its musicality, and its philosophical structure enhances their understanding of Romanian Romanticism and its role in shaping national identity during a time of political awakening.

Beyond the idealism and introspection of Eminescu lies a very different voice in Ion Luca Caragiale. Caragiale's contribution to Romanian literature is notable not for its lyricism, but for its sharp wit and keen observation of social life. As a playwright and short story writer, Caragiale captured the absurdities and contradictions of Romania's bureaucratic and political classes during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His characters are drawn from the urban middle class, and his dialogues reflect colloquial Romanian with all its humor, irony, and emotional volatility. For language learners, this presents a unique opportunity to engage with authentic, conversational language, while simultaneously developing an understanding of the social structures and tensions of the time.

Caragiale's works lend themselves well to interactive pedagogy. Scenes from plays such as *A Lost Letter* (*O scrisoare pierdută*) can be performed in class, allowing students to practice pronunciation, rhythm, and gesture in a communicative setting. Role-playing fosters engagement and deepens the emotional connection to the text, as students are encouraged not only to understand the lines but to embody the social and psychological dynamics of the characters. Through this process, learners move beyond language drills and into the realm of cultural performance, where literature is experienced as living dialogue.

While Eminescu and Caragiale represent foundational voices in Romanian literature, more contemporary authors such as Herta Müller and Mircea Cărtărescu introduce new dimensions of cultural reflection. Their works explore themes of memory, trauma, exile, and identity, particularly in the context of Romania's 20th-century history. Müller's writing, often fragmented and poetic, grapples with the psychological impact of dictatorship, surveillance, and displacement. Her narratives delve into the inner lives of individuals who live under repression, offering readers a visceral understanding of fear, alienation, and resilience. (Haines, 1998). For students, engaging with this literature offers a bridge between historical fact and emotional truth, allowing them to grasp the lived consequences of political ideology and state violence.

Mircea Cărtărescu, by contrast, represents a more introspective and postmodern turn in Romanian literature. His writing is marked by introspection, surreal imagery, and autobiographical layering, drawing readers into a dreamlike yet hyper-real landscape. His novels often blur the boundaries between memory and fiction, history and imagination. Teaching Cărtărescu involves guiding students through complex linguistic structures and metaphorical density, making it most suitable for advanced learners. Yet even short passages or translated excerpts can stimulate deep discussion about identity, urban life, and the shifting boundaries of personal and collective memory.

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Contemporary authors like Herta Müller and Mircea Cărtărescu offer a more experimental and critical take on modern Romanian identity. While suitable for advanced learners, their works highlight post-communist complexities and personal memory, pushing students to think beyond the stereotypical representations of Eastern Europe. In this sense, literary texts, when approached through a communicative and contextualized lens, can enhance vocabulary, deepen grammatical understanding, and engage learners in cultural reflection through the voices and experiences of specific Romanian writers.

Visual Arts as Cultural Texts

If literature allows learners to read a culture's voice, visual art allows them to see its soul. Romanian visual culture offers a multifaceted narrative of identity, ritual, and historical continuity. From peasant art forms and religious iconography to modernist abstraction, visual texts encode a set of values, emotions, and symbolic structures that can be powerfully integrated into the teaching of Romanian language and culture. Used effectively, visual art in the classroom becomes more than illustration, it functions as a semiotic system that complements and expands textual interpretation.

At the center of Romanian 20th-century visual art stands Constantin Brâncuși, whose sculptural work bridges the folk traditions of his birthplace with the avant-garde movements of Paris. Sculptures such as *Coloana Infinitului* (*The Endless Column*), *Sărutul* (*The Kiss*), *Masa Tăcerii* (*The Table of Silence*), or *Pasărea în văzduh* (*Bird in Space*) have become globally recognized symbols of spiritual and formal exploration. These works, though minimalist in appearance, are saturated with Romanian cultural references. (Bach et al., 1995)

Coloana Infinitului (*The Endless Column*, 1938), located in Târgu Jiu, is perhaps Brâncuși's most iconic Romanian installation. Composed of repeating rhomboidal modules, the column is a memorial to Romanian soldiers who died in World War I. In a classroom setting, students can be invited to analyze the symbolism of the column's upward repetition, connecting it to concepts of sacrifice, transcendence, and national memory. The form's roots in Romanian wooden spindle motifs (*fusul*) can be examined through parallel images of traditional Maramureș textile tools, highlighting how Brâncuși abstracted vernacular design into metaphysical sculpture. Language learners can describe the column using vocabulary related to geometric form (*romboid*, *coloană*, *înălțime*), material (*fontă*, *alamă*), and emotion (*memorie*, *eternitate*). (Geist, 1983)

Sărutul (*The Kiss*, 1907–08) also provides a deeply Romanian reinterpretation of a universal theme. Unlike Rodin's sensual, dynamic depiction, Brâncuși's sculpture presents two highly stylized figures in a rigid, frontal embrace, with conjoined eyes and unified form. This simplification, echoing funerary monuments in southern Romania, transforms romantic love into a spiritual and communal act. Teachers might pair *The Kiss* with fragments from traditional Romanian love poems or wedding customs, asking students to discuss how affection and partnership are visually and ritually represented. In terms of language instruction, this artwork supports vocabulary related to the body (*ochi*, *braț*, *chip*), emotion (*dragoste*, *unire*), and material (*piatră*, *sculptură*).

Pasărea în văzduh (*Bird in Space*, 1923) marks a departure from literal folk forms into pure abstraction. Yet even here, Brâncuși's inspiration is not disconnected from Romanian spirituality. The bird motif relates to soul flight in Romanian mythology, particularly in funerary songs such as *Cântecul Zburătorului*. In the classroom, this work can be used to explore themes of ascension and transformation. Students can compare *Bird in Space* with Orthodox icons of the Holy Spirit (often depicted as a dove), or with

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mythological birds from Romanian folklore such as Pasărea Măiastră. The simplicity of the form also opens discussion on the relationship between material and metaphor. Language tasks might include interpreting the sculpture's title, describing its reflective surface, and imagining its movement or sound using Romanian poetic devices.

Brâncuși's methodology, transforming folk motifs into universal forms, can be extended pedagogically by linking his work to *vernacular Romanian visual arts*, especially those found in village culture. Traditional wood carving (*sculptura în lemn*), particularly from Maramureș, is one of the most visually rich elements of rural Romanian life. Ornamental wooden gates (*porți maramureșene*), adorned with solar rosettes (*rozete solare*), rope motifs (*funia vieții*), and tree-of-life patterns (*pomul vieții*), serve as powerful cultural texts. In the classroom, these gates can be introduced via high-resolution images or short videos showing artisans at work (Lemny, 2005). Students can be guided to label parts of the gate, describe the symbolic motifs, and compare the gate to symbols in their own culture's architecture. A task might involve preparing a short oral presentation or written description of a gate's features, incorporating specific vocabulary (*poartă, stâlp, motiv tradițional, sculptură*).

Embroidery (broderia) is another traditional Romanian art form that can serve as a visual narrative of regional identity. Different regions, such as Oltenia, Bucovina, and Transylvania, use distinct color schemes, patterns, and stitch types in their traditional blouses (*ii*). These garments are visual markers of social status, geographic origin, and cultural memory. Teachers might introduce images of traditional costumes from each region, asking students to identify differences, describe patterns, or interpret the meaning of recurring symbols such as crosses, stars, or animal figures. For language acquisition, this activity supports vocabulary in textiles (*pânză, cusătură, ață, model*), colors, and regional terms.

A particularly rich visual tradition lies in *Orthodox icon painting (icoane)*, which blends Byzantine aesthetics with local stylistic adaptations. Icons in Romanian churches and monasteries often feature saints, biblical scenes, and celestial hierarchies, rendered in tempera and gold leaf on wooden panels. These images are not only religious objects but also visual commentaries on suffering, protection, and spiritual transformation. Introducing icons in class can be tied to thematic units on holidays, moral values, or religious language. For example, during a lesson on Easter customs, students might study the icon of *Învierea Domnului (The Resurrection of the Lord)* and identify figures, gestures, and narrative sequences. Activities may include describing what they see, sequencing the story depicted, or matching labels to iconographic elements (*aură, cruce, înger, apostol*).

Another effective classroom application involves using *funerary crosses from Săpânța*, part of the *Merry Cemetery (Cimitirul Vesel)*. Each cross combines a carved, painted portrait of the deceased with a short poem that humorously or honestly describes their life and death. This tradition offers a rare mix of visual art, biographical narrative, and poetic language. Teachers can use photographs of these crosses as prompts for both reading and creative writing tasks. Students might be asked to interpret the epitaphs, discuss the life story presented, or write a similar short text about a fictional character. This supports narrative structure, descriptive language, and cultural analysis, while exposing learners to regional variation and Romanian attitudes toward mortality.

In the modern and contemporary period, Romanian visual culture continues to develop through photography, installation, and experimental art. Introducing works by artists such as Geta Brătescu or Ion Grigorescu can prompt students to explore topics such

as identity, gender, urban life, or political resistance. Brătescu's collage work and textile-based installations can be paired with vocabulary related to shapes, textures, and spatial relationships, while Grigorescu's documentary photography of communist Romania invites reflection on historical change. Although more abstract and challenging, these materials are suitable for advanced learners who can engage with layered symbolic and socio-political meaning.

For beginner and intermediate learners, however, the strength of visual materials lies in their immediate legibility. A photograph of a painted monastery from Bucovina, such as *Voroneț*, with its vivid *Judgment Day* fresco (*Judecata de Apoi*) can support lessons on color, architectural vocabulary, and religious festivals. Students may identify and describe figures in the fresco, name colors, or construct sentences about what each person is doing, allowing for natural use of present tense and action verbs.

Visual prompts also enable the integration of comparative culture. A unit on rural life might involve side-by-side images of Romanian and foreign village architecture, agricultural practices, or seasonal rituals. Using curated visual materials, paintings, photographs, maps and objects, teachers can build learning sequences that alternate between description, interpretation, and cultural storytelling.

Ultimately, Romanian visual art forms, whether carved into wood, painted on walls, stitched into fabric, or cast in bronze, are more than aesthetic artifacts. They are semiotic systems that convey values, identities, histories, and mythologies. In language education, they function not only as support tools for vocabulary acquisition but as full-fledged cultural texts. When used deliberately, they allow students to decode Romanian culture not just as observers but as participants in its visual and symbolic language.

Pedagogical Strategies for Integration

Effectively integrating Romanian art and literature into the language and culture curriculum demands deliberate planning, sensitivity to learners' needs, and an adaptable pedagogical framework. The complexity and richness of Romania's cultural heritage offer a wealth of material, but not all texts, genres, or visual works are accessible to all students in the same way. Instructors must assess language proficiency, cognitive readiness, learning objectives, and the sociocultural context of learners when designing cultural units that combine both literary and visual components.

A foundational principle for such integration is "scaffolding", the strategic sequencing of materials and tasks to support gradual learning, a concept rooted in Vygotskian sociocultural theory. Scaffolding refers to the process by which teachers provide support structures to help learners achieve tasks slightly beyond their current level of competence (Vygotsky, 1978; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). One key challenge in the initial stages of learning Romanian is the learner's tendency to impose familiar grammatical frameworks onto the new language. As Stoian (2021:149) observes, "learning a foreign language can be challenging due to the fact that in the first stage, the learner will automatically try to connect the syntax of the new language to the set of grammar rules that exist in his mother-tongue." This phenomenon reinforces the need for carefully sequenced exposure to authentic Romanian syntax through simplified texts, bilingual resources, and guided practice.

For literary content, scaffolding may begin with simplified or adapted texts. In the case of *Lucefărul* (*The Morning Star*) by Mihai Eminescu, a teacher might first introduce the narrative structure in simplified prose, followed by selected stanzas with glossed vocabulary, and finally allow students to explore the original verse in full.

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Supplementary tools such as bilingual editions, recorded readings by Romanian actors, visual storyboards, or animated summaries can ease entry into complex poetic language. Learners might first identify characters, settings, and key events before analyzing metaphors or philosophical ideas.

For visual arts, scaffolding can take the form of a progression from observation to interpretation. When presenting *Coloana Infinitului* (*The Endless Column*) by Constantin Brâncuși, beginner students might start by describing the physical aspects of the sculpture using targeted vocabulary: *înaltă, aurie, repetitivă, abstractă*. Next, students might match images to descriptions, answer comprehension questions, or label diagrams. Only after this foundational understanding is in place should learners be asked to interpret symbolism, such as the idea of infinity, repetition, or ascension. Teachers can provide sentence frames or guiding questions in Romanian to help structure students' responses: *Ce simbolizează coloana? De ce crezi că artistul a ales această formă?*

Thematic organization of content offers another highly effective strategy, allowing for coherence across disciplines and text types. As Richards and Rodgers (2014) suggest, thematic organization allows learners to encounter vocabulary and ideas in multiple contexts, reinforcing retention and comprehension. A thematic unit entitled “Dragoste și dor” (*Love and Longing*) could incorporate a poem by Eminescu (*Mai am un singur dor / I Have One More Longing*), Brâncuși's sculpture *Sărutul* (*The Kiss*), and a folktale such as *Fata moșului și fata babei* (*The Old Man's Daughter and the Old Woman's Daughter*). These texts can be taught in parallel, with each addressing a different facet of love - romantic, spiritual, or familial. Language activities may include comparing adjectives used to describe emotions across the texts, identifying similar themes in visual and verbal forms, or rewriting the ending of a folktale to align with a modern view of relationships.

Thematic units can also respond to historical and political themes. A unit on “Exile and Memory” might include excerpts from Herta Müller's prose, images of Geta Brătescu's *Jurnal* (*Journal*) series, and oral histories or interviews from Romanian emigrants. Learners could analyze how trauma and loss are conveyed through metaphor, silence, or fragmentation. Tasks might include writing journal entries from the perspective of a character, analyzing visual symbols of confinement, or creating timelines that pair historical facts with literary representations. Such a unit not only teaches grammar and vocabulary related to past tense, emotions, and location, but also fosters critical reflection on migration, identity, and memory.

To activate students' linguistic and cognitive engagement, task-based learning (TBL) is particularly effective. TBL is grounded in the belief that meaningful communication should be central to language learning, and that tasks resembling real-world activities promote authentic use of the target language (Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2007). One example of a high-engagement task is the creation of a visual reinterpretation of a literary scene. After reading Ion Luca Caragiale's *Două loturi* (*Two Lottery Tickets*), students might be asked to storyboard the main scenes as a graphic narrative. This allows for a review of plot and character while promoting vocabulary related to daily life, luck, and emotion. In small groups, students can assign dialogue, choose visual elements that reflect the satirical tone, and present their final products to the class.

Multimodal learning, which incorporates text, image, sound, and performance, has become increasingly recognized as essential for engaging diverse learners and addressing multiple literacies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress, 2003). Projects such as curating a virtual exhibit of Romanian cultural artifacts—combining captions, recordings,

and oral presentations—require students to synthesize knowledge across disciplines and formats. These activities promote deeper cultural engagement while addressing all four language skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. For a final unit project, students could curate a virtual exhibition titled “What Is Romania?” selecting 3–5 works of art or literature studied during the semester. Each item would be accompanied by a short bilingual caption and a spoken tour guide script in Romanian. This kind of project requires summarizing, describing, analyzing, and presenting—integrating all language domains while deepening cultural insight.

Reflective and comparative writing tasks further reinforce intercultural competence. In line with Byram’s model of intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997), students should be encouraged not only to learn about Romanian perspectives but to reflect on their own cultural assumptions and experiences. A writing assignment comparing Romanian “*ie*” blouses with garments from students’ own cultures can develop skills in cultural comparison, description, and critical thinking. Such assignments foster intercultural discovery, the ability to interpret documents and practices from another culture, and relate them to one’s own.

In more advanced classrooms, students can be invited to conduct critical discourse analysis of Romanian cultural texts. For example, analyzing Caragiale’s satirical language in *O scrisoare pierdută* (*A Lost Letter*) offers insight into how rhetoric and humor function in Romanian political discourse. Encouraging students to identify patterns of manipulation, irony, or euphemism not only deepens language awareness but also trains them in socio-pragmatic competence—a skill particularly relevant in global and multicultural contexts (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1995).

Throughout these strategies, a consistent pedagogical goal must be critical engagement. This involves teaching students to interrogate, rather than merely absorb, the cultural representations they encounter. As Kramsch (1993) argues, culture in language teaching must be taught as discourse, not as a list of facts or products. For example, a unit examining the *Cimitirul Vesel* (*Merry Cemetery*) at Săpânța may begin with decoding epitaphs and carved portraits, but should also open into discussion about Romanian attitudes toward death, humor, and memory. Students should be encouraged to ask: What does this suggest about Romanian cultural values? How might it challenge Western norms about mourning and commemoration?

Romanian culture, like any culture, should not be presented as monolithic, exotic, or frozen in time. Instructors must encourage students to interrogate texts and ask questions such as: Whose voice is represented? Whose voice is missing? What assumptions are embedded in this image or narrative? For instance, when reading *Pădurea spânzuraților* (*The Forest of the Hanged*) by Liviu Rebreanu, students might explore how national identity conflicts with personal conscience, and what that reveals about war, duty, and belonging.

Cultural products, whether a Brâncuși sculpture or a poem by Nichita Stănescu, can also provoke transnational comparisons. A unit on memory might include images from the *Memorialul Victimelor Comunismului și al Rezistenței* (*Memorial to the Victims of Communism and to the Resistance*) in Sighet, alongside a discussion of memory politics in students’ home countries. Instructors can facilitate open-ended group discussions, debates, or case studies that examine both differences and shared challenges. Such critical engagement is central to transformative learning, an approach that goes beyond linguistic outcomes to reshape students’ perceptions and worldviews. Mezirow (1991) defines transformative learning as a process of critically examining one’s assumptions, engaging

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in dialogue, and reconstructing meaning. In the context of Romanian culture, transformative tasks might include examining how Brâncuși's *Pasărea în văzduh* (*Bird in Space*) redefines form and motion, or how Müller's minimalist prose articulates trauma without overt narrative closure.

To support these approaches, it is essential to sequence activities intentionally, design assessment tools that capture cultural understanding, and allow for learner autonomy. Students should have opportunities to select texts, interpret symbols, and co-construct meaning with peers. Language classrooms, when enriched by Romanian art and literature, become dynamic spaces of intellectual and cultural exchange.

To that end, digital tools and mobile learning strategies offer promising avenues for engaging learners. Incorporating mobile apps, digital storytelling tools, and online collaborative platforms can complement the use of traditional texts and artworks. As Lăpădat (2023:267) notes, "The integration of mobile technology in language education has facilitated an environment conducive to continuous and engaging vocabulary learning, significantly enhancing learners' interaction with the target language."

Equally important is addressing the problem-solving nature of real-time classroom dynamics. Teachers must be ready to adapt to diverse learner needs, spontaneous challenges, and evolving classroom contexts—especially in online or hybrid settings. Flexibility in teaching style, paired with varied learning tasks—from visual analysis and literary interpretation to group debates and creative writing—helps maintain engagement and supports diverse learning preferences.

Intercultural Competence through Aesthetic Experience

Beyond linguistic proficiency and cultural literacy, one of the most profound goals of language education is the development of intercultural competence—the ability to navigate, interpret, and engage with cultural differences in meaningful and respectful ways. Art and literature serve as powerful vehicles in this process, not only because they communicate values and beliefs, but because they engage learners in aesthetic experience, which can be deeply transformative.

When students encounter a Romanian poem, painting, or piece of folk music, they are not just receiving information, they are entering into an emotional and imaginative relationship with another worldview. This aesthetic experience has the potential to shift perspectives, challenge assumptions, and cultivate empathy. It is not uncommon for students, when reading a melancholic verse by Nichita Stănescu or listening to a doina lament, to feel an emotional resonance that transcends language barriers. Such moments, often difficult to quantify, play a crucial role in shaping learners' attitudes toward the target culture.

The emotional engagement that art and literature evoke helps to dismantle the notion of culture as a distant or static object. Instead, culture becomes something alive, complex, and personal. A foreign learner who writes a response poem to Luceafărul, or who reimagines one of Brâncuși's sculptures through their own cultural lens, is not just learning about Romanian culture, they are entering into a dialogue with it. This dialogic approach fosters respect for difference while also highlighting shared human experiences, such as love, loss, longing, and resilience.

Moreover, these aesthetic encounters allow for critical reflection. Rather than presenting Romanian culture as a monolith or a list of customs, teachers can use art and literature to invite students to question and interpret. For instance, students might be asked: What does national identity mean in Eminescu's time versus today? How do the

themes in Romanian literature compare with those of their own countries? What does it mean for Brâncuși to take traditional forms and rework them in an international modernist style? These questions not only develop analytical skills, but also prepare students to engage with cultural difference in a thoughtful and informed manner.

Importantly, the development of intercultural competence through art and literature is bidirectional. Learners do not passively absorb Romanian culture, they reflect upon it, respond to it, and sometimes critique it from their own perspectives. This co-creative process reinforces the idea that culture is not a closed system but an evolving conversation. Encouraging students to draw parallels between Romanian artistic expressions and those from their own backgrounds allows them to appreciate both the uniqueness and the universality of human expression.

In a time marked by increasing global mobility and cultural contact, such competencies are more important than ever. Students who learn to interpret a painting, understand a historical novel, or feel the mood of a poem are acquiring more than vocabulary, they are gaining tools to understand otherness, to listen across difference, and to build bridges through beauty and meaning.

Conclusion

Integrating art and literature into the teaching of Romanian culture is not merely an aesthetic choice, it is a pedagogical necessity. These elements illuminate the depths of Romanian identity, offering learners the opportunity to engage with the language in holistic, meaningful, and transformative ways. From the timeless lyricism of Eminescu to the sculptural abstractions of Brâncuși, Romanian creative expression provides fertile ground for language learning infused with cultural resonance. When adapted thoughtfully to learners' needs, artistic and literary texts can foster linguistic competence, critical thinking, intercultural sensitivity, and emotional engagement.

Lăpădat (2022) aptly describes the RL2 learning journey as “a transition, a metamorphosis of the struggle to communicate ideas,” highlighting how the learning of Romanian as a second language transforms not only linguistic proficiency but also cognitive and emotional insight. Language learners do not simply accumulate vocabulary and grammar—they are shaped by the cultural narratives they encounter and the emotional engagements they experience along the way. Moreover, the transformation of the learner demands a dynamic pedagogical response. The information we provide cannot and must not be restricted to traditional structures of grammar, vocabulary and so on. We need to stay connected to “an entire apparatus of updated cultural and informational references” (Lăpădat & Lăpădat, 2020:139). In this light, cultural education must move beyond rote learning and embrace multimedia, current events, and evolving cultural expressions.

Adapting to the complexities of the educational landscape is crucial. “The educational environment confronts us with problem solving situations as a matter of priority” (Bărbuceanu, 2022:183). Language educators must adopt a flexible, responsive approach that can accommodate spontaneous challenges, differing proficiency levels, and varying levels of cultural familiarity.

This need for adaptability is especially pronounced in digital contexts. As Burtea-Cioroianu (2022:137) states, “the teaching methods need to be alternated to keep alive the attention and interest of students in online courses.” Teachers who rotate between visual analysis, creative writing, live discussion, and project-based learning can more effectively maintain student engagement and promote retention.

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Ultimately, no pedagogical approach can succeed without an understanding of learner diversity. As Scorțan (2021:142) reminds us, “these different learning styles clearly show that each learner has distinctive characteristics for the appropriation of knowledge.” A student-centered model that recognizes individual differences, cultural background, and cognitive style is essential to successful language acquisition and intercultural competence.

In a world increasingly shaped by cross-cultural interaction, language education must do more than teach communication. It must teach understanding. Through the integrated use of Romania’s artistic and literary heritage, educators can open doors not just to a language, but to the imagination and history of a people. And in doing so, they invite learners into a shared human story—told in lines of verse, in brushstrokes and stone, in memory and voice.

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