UNIVERSITATEA "AUREL VLAICU" DIN ARAD

ŞCOALA DOCTORALĂ INTERDISCIPLINARĂ

FACULTATEA DE ŞTIINŢE UMANISTE ŞI SOCIALE

DOMENIUL DE DOCTORAT FILOLOGIE

THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS OF TEACHING AND EVALUATING METHODOLOGY-THE MFL GCSE EXAM IN THE UK

SUMMARY

Coordonator ştiinţific,

Conf.univ.dr.habil. Mihăilescu Clementina Alexandra

Student doctorand,

Codrean Mădălina Ioana

ARAD

2021

"Introduction" clarifies why the particular topic of analyzing the methodology of the GCSE exams in the UK has been selected to be tackled in the present doctoral thesis via the close approach to annotating the exam papers but also the marking scheme. Due to my interest in the language skills, I have considered Adriana Vizental's and Jeremy Harmer's perspectives. These have been studied and represented the fundamental idea for this research.

Chapter 1, entitled "Language Skills-Testing and Evaluation Theoretically Approached via Jeremy Harmer and Adriana Vizental", focuses on the importance of the four language skills taught during a lesson and the impact they have on students' preparation for the GCSE exam. Language skills are individually analyzed and the key aspect is represented by the fact that language skills facilitate the students' use of knowledge productively during lessons and exams.

I have closely examined the definition of each skill that consists of systematic examinations. Listening represents the first language skill that, as native speakers, we acquire. It requires using both our ears and brain in order to understand language as it is being spoken. All native languages require this skill. Speaking is considered the second skill that we obtain as native speakers. It involves the use of our vocal tract and brain in order to produce the language through sound. In order for students to become fluent, it is mandatory to actually start speaking. Reading is the third language skill and it involves our eyes and brain to understand the equivalent of spoken language, which this time is written. Lastly, writing represents the fourth skill and it requires our hands and brain to be able to produce the symbols that is actually the spoken language.

Regarding the receptive skills, listening refers to the ability of understanding oral messages and reading involves the ability of understanding written messages. Here, the speaker is considered a recipient of both language and information. On the other hand, in regards to the productive skills, speaking represents the ability of producing oral messages whilst writing distinguishes the ability of producing written messages. In this case, the speaker is properly involved in the act of actually producing language. Therefore, the students have to produce language on their own. Then, I have explored each skill individually as I considered it crucial for developing the following chapters.

1) Listening skills-it is crucial that during a lesson, students hear someone else's voice apart from the teacher's. In order to be able to speak to someone in a different language, students need to understand what people are saying. In the UK, for teaching languages, teachers have access to interactive books, such as the Studio book (for French), Viva book (for Spanish) or Stimmt book (for German). They can easily access all the activities and even create their own worksheets. Listening is easier this way, much more modern than having CDs or old tapes. Similarly, this interactive book is extremely useful in particular when we set listening exercises for homework. You simply access the Active Learn site (where teachers have an account) and you create a task or more from any books that you have access to. After that, you assign it to the class you want and also set a date. Impressively, you can check their progress at any time.

2) Reading skills-Reading represents a consistent process in which people construct meaning by using both past experience and present skills. In real life, people read for a reason, they have a purpose. We can read a newspaper if we want to keep updated or a novel for pleasure. Adriana Vizental suggests some reading techniques, such as global reading and sentence-level reading. At the beginning of each topic, teachers recommend to students to have a vocabulary sheet stuck in their folders (KS4) or their books (KS3). In this way, whenever they have to translate a text that involves that specific vocabulary, they can easily access it. At the same time, students are expected to memorize the vocabulary specific for each unit or module they study.

3) Speaking represents the act of producing vocal sounds. It helps people to communicate effectively and it ensures that we will not be misunderstood by the listener. It is divided into interactive, partially interactive and non-interactive. When it comes to teaching speaking, modern foreign languages teachers must bear in mind that some students can be shy and they could refuse to speak during the lessons. The role of the educators is to ensure that they help students to gain confidence and stretch them by giving them extra tasks or challenges. In this way, we encourage and raise the students' self-esteem. The interactive speaking involves phone conversations and, obviously, face-to-face conversations. As speakers, we can ask for clarifications or even repetitions. A speaking situation can be partially interactive if, for example, you

give a speech to an audience (in case the audience does not interrupt one's speech). The non-interactive speaking situations refer to recording yourself with the purpose to practise for an exam, for example. In this case, no feedback is given and there are no disruptions. As a definition, good pronunciation refers to sounding, to speaking like a native speaker. Thus, this predicts the students' frustration. They know that this is very hard to achieve, and it requires a lot of effort. As a result, very few students will be able to sound like a native speaker. This implies that speaking with inborn pronunciation is an uncommon goal to reach.
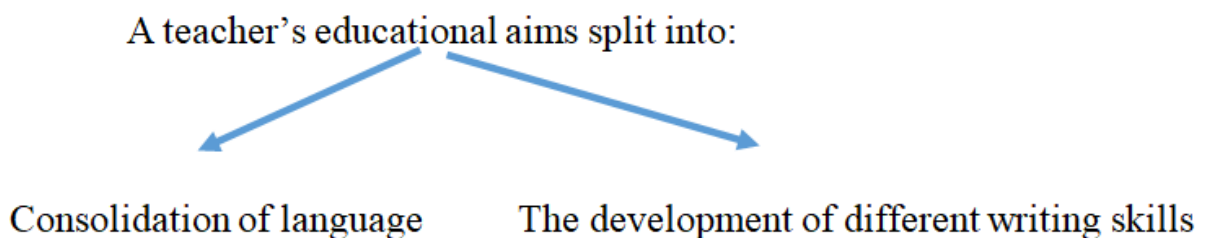
In contrast, since speaking is considered vital for a speaker, intelligible pronunciation represents for students a realistic goal to achieve. Intelligible pronunciation relates to speaking, communicating in such a way that other speakers might be able to understand without much difficulty. Intelligible pronunciation is recommended by both researchers and teachers. However, as teachers, we cannot set very low expectations either. We should not allow students to think that their pronunciation is fine when, actually, it is only understood by classmates and their teacher, who is actually used to their inaccurate pronunciation. In terms of perfection, learners have also to include a good accent. Teachers suggest learners to get as close to a near standard as possible, because a very different accent can be confusing, including negative judgements about one's competence.

While in writing we use orthography in order to produce good grammar and words, in speaking we use terms such as intonation, pitch and stress in order to express meaning. Intonation is described as being the melody of a language, or its music. Students that learn a new language state that intonation normally refers to the process of recognizing whether it goes up or down, or if it stays flat. This is due to the fact that it can be different from their native language. We use intonation in order to pass our message across.

Based on my experience in the past few years, in the UK, the most common mode of speaking is the spoken interaction, at least for MFL, and especially in terms of the GCSE exams. That is because the greatest feature of spoken interaction is the unexpectedness. From the very beginning, teachers prepare students for face-to-face conversations and, in order to tackle that, they use the role-play, photo card and general conversations. All these are part of the final speaking exam.

4) Writing skills-One of the main questions a teacher may come across to is: "Why do we teach writing?" We must remember that writing belongs to productive skills and, therefore it represents a fundamental part in engaging in social, professional, community but also civic activities. Writing is considered practical, as we need to write every day to complete some tasks, such as to complete a CV, to write a very important letter or email, or even to fill in a form. Without writing, there is no student education because almost all of the assessments require shorter or longer written answers. Similarly, nowadays, writing is one of the most important forms of communication, especially if we consider teenagers and young adults. Writing an email, texting or even using social media represents a way of keeping in touch with our colleagues or family. Writing is chosen when some feelings cannot be expressed by speaking. At the same time, some students struggle writing essays or any other types of writing, because they lack a sense of organization, coherence and clarity. While spoken texts are not organized and complete and the vocabulary belongs strictly to the basic word stock, written texts are very well structured and the vocabulary is sophisticated and ambitious; they avoid ellipsis, repetitions, fillers and pauses.

Spelling and writing are closely linked; teaching young students the importance of spelling will benefit them in all areas of their learning as learners who feel confident with word patterns and letters are more able to read, comprehend and write a complex text. However, in most of the cases the link between written words and sounds seems arbitrary and, thus, more difficult for many learners. The vital thing is to build strong knowledge of the relationships between letters, sound and forms.

A teacher's educational aims split into:

Consolidation of language   The development of different writing skills

Consolidation of language consists of vocabulary and grammatical structures. The teacher can choose from labeling pictures, arranging jumbled words (for weaker students) or sentences (for more gifted students) or filling in slots. Dictation is one of the most veteran writing techniques and it develops at the same time listening skills. The advantages of dictation are represented by the fact that it does not require preparation (like cutting-up activities or matching vocabulary) and it can be done with any level, depending on the text, of course. Some types of dictation are running dictation, mini board dictation, picture dictation and moving dictation. The development of writing skills is extremely important as it helps students to produce proficient pieces. There are three types that can be distinguished: creative writing, functional writing and academic writing.

Creative writing helps students to develop as writers and thus, it offers a range of strategies and is one of the most popular techniques in England. A whole module about how to use your imagination is taught in the last 7 weeks of school, normally in the last half-term, before the summer holidays. However, it is also used as part of the assessments as each term, as a rule, the students have to write a reading assessment and a writing one. They study one book per term and when they finish analyzing it, they need to write an assessment based on that book. On the other hand, the proper writing assessment consists of writing a diary entry or a short story about a topic. For example, this term, Year 7 students have to describe a memory of a time when they had been in trouble. Year 9 students have to write a description suggested by a picture or write an opening based on a written prompt.

Bringing together and closely analyzing the language skills, I have looked at how I can include them in starters and plenaries. In terms of starters, they are extremely important during a lesson because they help students to settle down. When they enter a classroom and they see the starter on the board or on their tables, they know straight away what is expected from them. In most cases, starters contribute to a sense of pace. A starter is successfully interactive if students engage in learning from the very beginning. During starters, students acquire a better understanding of the learning objectives and the main purpose of the lesson. Equally important, starters help in terms of managing the students' behavior. The real challenge is to get all students on-task as soon as they enter the classroom. In order to tackle that, the task has to hook the students' interest. The teachers should incorporate a mystery and curiosity element or some sort

of particular relevance. In general, the writing or reading activities are less likely to hook the students' attention.

On the other hand, during plenaries, students can extend and increase learning and confidence level. A plenary gives students a chance to reflect on what was learnt during the lesson. Plenaries take place at a deliberate moment during the teaching sequence. The main purpose is to secure and reinforce learning. Finally, plenaries usually determine the next steps in the learning process.

Chapter 2, entitled "A Representation of the French GCSE Exam in the UK" highlights that the assessment represents a way of figuring out if the process of learning has taken place. This facilitates us to discover if our students have accumulated the required skills and knowledge at some point during their process of learning. If the teachers do not plan and do not arrange any assessments, they will never know what the students have learnt. Nevertheless, this chapter is helping us to progressively understand the greatest difference between the GCSE exam in the UK and the one in Romania.

First of all, I have referred to marking. When trying to learn a new language, students will make mistakes. These mistakes can be either spoken or written and they are part of any new learning process. Ideally, they should be treated positively. If teachers treat the mistakes positively, then students tend to learn from their mistakes. Correction refers to a very complex part of any teacher's role, in which the most important thing is to make the students aware what mistakes they have made and teach them not to repeat them. Feedback represents the process in which information is given to students, normally by a teacher, and contains all forms of interactions. It is normally oral and written and it is substantially involved in the accomplishment of correcting. The purpose of feedback is to have a positive impact upon learning. More than that, it has to be informative, and not behavioral. Feedback will be positive and effective only when it challenges the students. In most cases, a good feedback will result in progress.

In terms of the GCSE exams, the listening exam represents a complex one and it involves, first of all, understanding different types of spoken language and then responding to them. Students will be entered for either Foundation Tier or Higher Tier but the condition is that

they must enter at the same tier for all four skills. For example, a student that struggles with the listening skills can be entered for the Foundation tier but cannot do Higher tier for the writing exam, even if he/she is better at it. Students must be entered in Year 11, in around April, as the exam start in early May, and it happens after a conversation with the teacher. Target levels are obviously taken into consideration, too. If a student has been given a target 3 back in Year9, at the beginning of the GCSE studies, it is unlikely to be entered at the Higher tier in Year 11 for the exam, for obvious reasons.

For such a topic to be properly dealt with, I had to explain in detail how the examination takes place. The foundation tier students have 35 minutes to complete the whole listening exam and the higher tier students have 45 minutes to complete it. The foundation tier exam is allocated 40 marks per paper and the higher one is allocated 50 marks per paper. This exam represents 25% of the GCSE exam. The test will be studio recorded using native speakers speaking in standard speech at near normal speed. The recording will be provided to schools in an appropriate audio format. This will happen at the same time as the dispatch of the question papers, in order to avoid misunderstandings. There will be used different types of spoken language, including the use of familiar language. Normally, an example will be provided in the question paper but only where it is necessary, in order to indicate to students how a specific question should be answered. The good thing about the listening is that each item will be heard twice, which helps to encourage the students. In general, the students can make a decision about the answer they will give only after the second go. One of the most important things that students can do during a listening is to listen to the utterance twice, not basing their answer on the first thing they hear; there are normally so-called distractors that will interfere in the students' understanding. That is why it is crucial that students listen to the whole utterance twice. Even if they choose the answer after the first time they listen, it is suggested to double check the answer and listen twice. Obviously, access to dictionaries is not permitted at any time during the test, not even for the EAL students.

Concerning the marking scheme for the listening exam, the qualification will be graded on a nine-point scale: 1 to 9 – 9 being the highest grade. A Foundation tier student will be awarded a grade within the range of 1 to 5. In case students fail to reach the minimum standard for grade 1, they will be recorded as U (unclassified) and will not receive a qualification

certificate. On the other hand, a Higher tier student will be awarded a grade within the range of 4 to 9. A student sitting the Higher tier who fails to achieve grade 4 will be then awarded a grade 3, which would not normally be part of Higher tier marking scheme. In case students fail to reach the minimum standard for the allowed grade 3, they will be recorded as U (unclassified) and unfortunately, will not receive a qualification certificate either.

In terms of the reading exam, it focuses on both understanding and responding to different types of written language only. The Foundation tier students only have 45 minutes to complete the question paper, while the Higher tier students have one hour, so they get 15 minutes extra. However, the maximum mark for both Foundation and Higher is 60 and it represents 25% of the total. During the exam, there will be used different types of written language, including relevant personal communication, public information and literary texts. During the test the access to dictionaries is not permitted. Concerning the marking scheme, responses will be assessed according to a complex mark scheme; the appropriate mark(s) will be awarded only if the student has communicated his or her understanding. Sometimes, the response may contain some errors in the quality of language used. Sometimes, the students tend to add more words than required in order to answer a question. The examiners must accept this as long as the answer does not contradict the idea that has to be communicated. If, however, the students' additional answer makes the main idea ambiguous, the examiners must reject the answer and the students will not gain any mark.

Surprisingly, unlike the reading exam, the format of the speaking exam paper will be exactly the same both for Higher and Foundation tier. The speaking exam is very complex and it is divided into three parts: role-play, photo card and general conversation. The speaking exam is assessed by the class teacher and then sent to the examination center in order to be marked, the maximum mark being 60 for both tiers: 15 marks for the role-play, 15 marks for the photo card and 30 marks for the general conversation. The explanation of each sub-task has facilitated the understanding of the structure.

a) The role-play, as well as the photo card, is based on a stimulus card and is prepared straight before the exam, like the photo card. The preparation time is 12 minutes, so students should ideally spend 6 minutes on the role-play and 6 minutes on the photo card. The main purpose of the role-play is to answer several questions but also to pass on new information.

Students have to answer an unexpected question/or to ask one, so they cannot prepare for it. Both Foundation and Higher tier have to engage in the role-play for around 2 minutes. The examiner should have a timer and time all three parts. In case the students communicate more than 2 minutes, they will get penalized and cannot get full marks for this part. It happens the same in case they do not engage enough, in case the answers are too short.

b) The photo card conversation should last 2 minutes for the Foundation tier and 3 minutes for the Higher tier, respecting the rules above, in terms of students' engagement. All students will receive a photo card and each photo card comes with three questions. However, during the examination, the teacher will ask two more unexpected questions.

c) The general conversation concentrates on the other two themes that have not been discussed while assessing the photo card. The Foundation tier should entertain in the conversation between 3-5 minutes, while the Higher tier should be able to communicate for 5-7 minutes. The general conversation comprehends two sub-parts, one topic chosen before the exam by the students. Normally, they prepare answers for these questions a few weeks before the exam and generally they choose a topic that they enjoyed studying. The other topic is chosen by the teacher instantly and it has to be from a theme that has not been covered for the photo card. Normally, as part of their assessment, starting from year 9, whenever they finish studying a module, they must answer the specific set of questions. Before the exam, they decide which set of question-what topic-they want to discuss during the exam. It is mandatory that students ask a question while engaged in the conversation, ideally a follow-up one, so the discussion does not seem pre-learnt.

For the study to be successfully fulfilled, I finally referred to the writing exam. Compared to the reading and listening skills, writing requires extended time; that might imply learning or memorizing some specific grammatical structures that can be used across any topic. While spoken texts are not organized and complete and the vocabulary belongs strictly to the basic word stock, written texts are very well structured and the vocabulary is sophisticated and ambitious; they avoid ellipsis, repetitions, fillers and pauses. In other words, students are expected to communicate productively for a variety of objectives. Students must produce short texts, which are meaningful and clear, and express opinions and justifications. Students are also

expected to manipulate the grammar and language, by using a great variety of vocabulary and grammatical structures but also by using the appropriate style and register.

Last chapter, entitled "Active Engagement Strategies and the Use if ICT in Order to Enhance Language Learning," focuses on demonstrating how, gradually, teachers start to successfully integrate the technology into their classes. Students tend to engage in their learning only if their teachers are inventive, modern and create new opportunities for the students' learning. Students learn better when they show interest and when they are challenged by the activities that teachers create for them. It highlights the importance and the role that ICT plays nowadays in education. Similarly, it has been discussed if modern digital tools can eventually replace the ordinary teachers in order for students to succeed in exams and achieve their final targets. The way the teachers tackle the educational system across the world in a pandemic has been highlighted and evaluated after the rapid expansion of online education.

I have further investigated the students' behavior: when we refer to students being engaged in a lesson, it means that they show interest, behave well and are ready to learn new, interesting things. The great advantage is that if the students are hooked, teachers do not have to cope with behavior management and do not have to worry about it. The department discussed the possibilities of how we can make sure that the students are fascinated by our resources and our teaching style. It has been demonstrated that the teacher must provide a varied amount of opportunities for students to experience that will develop their interest and concerns; encourage students to always ask questions, especially when they are stuck with a task. Nowadays, the use of a video projector and a computer for every single lesson, the use of the internet, a laser pointer, a timer for most competitions, visual aids, interactive board and games such as Kahoot, SPLAT and Memrise provide outstanding activities. Once we welcome the technology in our classroom, we can benefit from better learning, happier students and good results. Let us discover which style is more favorable for the students' intelligence and creativity.

Due to my interest in using the technology, it has been demonstrated that teachers cannot be completely replaced by ICT but an effective teacher will be one that uses ICT in class on a regular basis. Some advantages of ICT point to the fact that it improves dramatically the lesson design (a modern teacher will always tackle teaching by integrating computer-related factors during a lesson), but most importantly, it motivates and engages students to learn by using

challenging methods. The students feel much more confident if given a digital version of a textbook than a printed copy of it. In this way, the students can add accuracy to their work and are more capable of accessing a vast diversity of approaches. When using a digital tool, the students can modify, draft, re-draft and refine the work that is in progress as many times as they want, in a much easier way. Of course, needless to say that each department should closely liaise with the ICT department in order to make sure that the students have suitable ICT skills. All students must be able to know how to research, download files, send them online, draft and edit documents and recognize graphics.

To show how this functions, as teachers, we need to ensure that we have available ICT resources for the lesson we are planning. For example, for us, the languages teachers, it is crucial to have access to different online platforms or sites that contain practice papers for the listening skill. In the UK, the schools do not use tapes anymore; everything is done via the computer and it includes the recording of an oral exam, which prior to this, had been done by using a tape recorder. The implementation of ICT across the schools refers to different opportunities for students to apply ICT skills in all subjects; this has to be seen in the schemes of learning but also in the whole-school policies. In the UK, all lessons must be done in Power Point, so teachers must have minimal knowledge of how to use Microsoft Office.

The question that we all ask is if online lessons can replace teachers effectively and permanently. Regardless how helpful all the digital techniques are, virtual school cannot provide the support given to students and the interactions with them. In order for these assumptions to be considered, I referred to the period we all have spent our time teaching online, from home. For correctly interpreting the patterns, I have highlighted some advantages and disadvantages.

The biggest disadvantage is that in the virtual setting, students face more distractions than in the classroom. In this way, they can lose their motivation; therefore the online lessons are not as effective as the ones that take place in class, where teachers and teaching assistants always lead and control the students. Let us not forget that one of the roles of a teacher is to engage the students and motivate them to work at the best of their ability.

On the other hand, the online lessons have to be structured in a way so that all students understand the new topic and respond to all tasks and extensions to apply the content. That is

why teachers worked actually more during the lockdown than they would have done normally. In order to offer a better support to students, the teachers had to integrate guided learning in their lessons.

Nowadays, when online schools took over and technology represents a great contribution to the educational system, it is best to keep up to date with all online platforms and see what they can offer us. The main point is to start using them in lessons, even if these happen in class or online. In general, teachers who use technology are much more appreciated as they try to bring the idea of 'newness', 'different' and 'innovation'. Teachers are advised to often participate in CPD (Continuing Professional Development) and bring in their lessons all ideas they are introduced to. Since I have assumed that all teacher have now got more experience regarding teaching online, I suggested some online platforms that can be used in lessons from now on.

Active Learn represents a resourceful platform and both teachers and pupils can have access to it, as long as the schools pay for the annual subscription. Teachers can use it for teaching, creating lesson plans, testing the students, both for end of unit exams and end of year exams. Normally, the package comes with exam papers, scheme of marking and boundaries for the grades, which eases teachers' work. In this way, teachers can concentrate more on how to deliver the lessons and make them interesting by using technology. For children, it also represents a great place where they can practise what they have just learnt or always come back to a topic that they have not covered.

Similarly, *Linguascope* is also a fascinating platform that challenges students by making them more proactive and more effective in terms of learning. While using this platform, they learn by playing. Again, the school has to pay annually for a subscription and students constantly use in class or at home to practise new or old content. The pupils choose either the Elementary, Beginner or Intermediate, depending on their ability. Once in, they choose the language and then start revising on a chosen module. Unfortunately, we cannot check how much work the students do at home by using this platform, unless they only complete the work sheet that come with each module and they print it as proof of work. However, we can book Ipads or take them to a computer room, where we can supervise that they do work.

The subchapter entitled "Conclusions" reiterates the basic theoretical concerns related to the language skills and shows how they have been helpful to plan our lessons accordingly. It also highlights all the main points in terms of teaching lessons, including online, and marking the GCSE exams.

In "Revisiting Limitations of the Thesis and Directions for Future Research," I have started from the assumption that, since our school is going to introduce French A-level studies (high school studies) from this September, it would be beneficial and constructive to parallel and offer a view regarding the examination of the end of this cycle.

To summarize, in order for the students to develop high-esteem, make great progress, feel more confident and work well with peers, teachers need to establish great relationships with students, create a supportive and safe environment and engage students accordingly, by using modern ways of teaching, such as computers, games and songs. Modern teachers are more focused on getting the routines right in order to tackle the students' poor behavior. That is why we need a good structure of the syllabus, including a lot of ICT skills, as technology nowadays plays a very important role in teaching and learning. This representation gives teachers another perspective in terms of the modern equipment used within a lesson but also factors, tricks and games to raise students' motivation for learning.