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# Latin Curricula, Attitudes and Achievement: An Empirical Investigation<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores interrelations between Latin curricula, students' attitudes and achievement within the Serbian educational system. The study was conducted in June 2016, using a mixed- methods approach, in

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which the quantitative element predominated. Six groups of participants were engaged, a total of 146 first-year students attending a gymnasium in Niš (Serbia). In addition, data was collected on the Latin curricula and textbooks. This study demonstrates a strong correlation between Latin curricula, attitudes and achievement, and thus it could contribute to the understanding of the impact of curricula on teaching and learning foreign language.

*Keywords: Latin learning, curricula, students' attitudes, achievement, empirical study*

## **1. Introduction**

While international traditions of teaching and learning Latin are expected to have some fundamental similarities, there are differences as well. The workshop *Linguistics and Latin learning* organized at the 19<sup>th</sup> *International Colloquium on Latin Linguistics* (24<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> April 2017, Munich) was valuable in light of overview studies showing that only a minority of comparative analyses relates to more than one country (Johnsen 2014, 268). When we talk of empirical research on Latin learning, we are aware that 'there is on-going debate about the processes of second language acquisition, and that issues are interpreted differently in separate national contexts, and impact differently on national curricula' (Grenfell, Kelly and Jones 2003, 33). Nevertheless, we may speculate that, despite the differences, Latin curricula across Europe and around the world still begin with the advantage of a common core. To make matters more specific, I will now turn to an overview of the history of Latin learning in Serbia.

## **2. Overview of the history of Latin learning in Serbia**

Serbia as an independent country has a respectful tradition of teaching Latin, albeit no longer than a century and a half (Loma 2004).<sup>2</sup> I

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<sup>2</sup> While the medieval Serbian elite was expected to know Greek, and the Serbian language was greatly influenced by Greek, the influence of Latin appeared later, and 'never became an important part of the Serbian cultural identity' (Zečević and Ristović 2017, 333). In 1875, the Department of Classics

will leave aside the case of a much longer tradition of classical education in Vojvodina (Ristović 2017), the north region of Serbia, since this region was part of the Habsburg Monarchy till the end of World War I. In the nineteenth century, as a young European country, Serbia followed the educational trends previously developed in other parts of Europe, especially in France and Germany. Accordingly, before and after World War I, Latin was a compulsory subject in Serbian gymnasiums, as was the case with the rest of Europe. The situation changed tremendously after World War II with the establishment of the communist regime (Jovanović 2013).<sup>3</sup> Gymnasiums were gradually converted into vocationally oriented schools and Latin was in the verge of extinction in Serbia. The Yugoslav communist era ended in the year 1990 and the change in regime resulted in the reforms of the educational system. Gymnasiums and gymnasium curricula began to flourish, the positive results of which are still apparent today. Now Latin is a compulsory subject for all first-grade gymnasium students, apart from the students of the Mathematical Gymnasium in Belgrade.<sup>4</sup> Despite its firm position within the Serbian educational system for more than two and a half decades,<sup>5</sup> there is no empirical research on teaching and learning Latin in Serbia apart from this one.

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was established in Belgrade, and it stands as the only institution of its kind in Serbia to the present day. The first professor of Classics who taught at the University of Belgrade was Jovan Turoman (born in 1840 in the village Ustici in the Habsburg Monarchy, died in 1915 in Novi Sad). He devoted himself to organizing learning and teaching classical languages on a firmer basis. For more information about this pioneer of classical studies in Serbia, see Nedeljković 2004.

<sup>3</sup> For the wider picture of the history of classical studies behind the Iron Curtain see, for example, Karsai et al. (2013) and Martirosova Torlone, Lacourse Munteanu and Dutsch (2017).

<sup>4</sup> In addition, Latin is a compulsory subject in some vocationally oriented secondary schools (medicine, veterinary, agricultural, etc.).

<sup>5</sup> The position of Latin within the secondary education system in Serbia is stronger than in most of the countries on the Balkans, including Greece. For the situation in Greece during the '90s see, for example, Mastrogrianni (1999). The things got even worse last year in September, when Education Minister announced his intention to scrap Latin from the country's secondary education

### 3. Theoretical framework

Issues of theory and practice are intimately linked in education throughout its history, but there is also an ever-lasting tension between them. Some authors have already conceived this tension, and argued that educational theory is different from other forms of theory (Hirst 1966). First, educational theory seems quite academic and does not relate directly to what to do in the classroom. Secondly, the channel of knowledge is not reciprocal – academics are telling teachers how to view the world, but teachers do not embrace theory and feel that it has little practical value (Elliott 1991).<sup>6</sup>

Educational theory<sup>7</sup> plays a crucial role at the beginning rather than the end of educational research, because it is indispensable for the conceptualization of the phenomenon under investigation (Biesta 2013, 7). Since Latin curricula are here in the focus, it is important to see how the curriculum is conceptualized in this study.

For a long time, researchers have dwelled on many aspects of curriculum,<sup>8</sup> and the most debated aspect remains that of the definition of a *curriculum*.<sup>9</sup> The definitions expanded to mean either an ‘experience’ (Tanner and Tanner 1975), or a ‘plan’ (Pratt 1994). If we follow the former definition, we can say that ‘the curriculum is not the intention or prescription but what happens in real situations ... Curriculum study is case study’ (Stenhouse 1975, 2). The explanation which says that curriculum is ‘all the learning which is planned and guided by the

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system. According to the new plan, Latin will be replaced with sociology and the measure should apply as of June 2020.

<sup>6</sup> It is unsurprisingly that Latin teachers are not an exception. This assumption is grounded on many informal conversations I have had with Latin teachers in the course of the last two decades, but it should be investigated more rigorously.

<sup>7</sup> Educational theory should be viewed as an amalgam of personal, social and contextual processes (Grenfell, Kelly and Jones 2003, 24).

<sup>8</sup> There is still a lack of a theory of curriculum (Shapiro 2013, 307).

<sup>9</sup> At the same time we should bear in mind that ‘definitions of the word *curriculum* do not solve curricular problems; but they do suggest perspectives from which to view them’ (Stenhouse 1975, 1).

school, whether it is carried on in groups or individually, inside or outside the school' goes in the same direction (Kelly 1983, 10). According to the latter definition, curriculum could be viewed as 'a general over-all plan of the content or specific materials of instructions that the school should offer the student' (Connelly and Lantz 1991, 15). This approach focuses on content, and curriculum is viewed as a body of knowledge. Accordingly, education is the process by which that knowledge is 'transmitted' to students through the most effective methods (Blenkin et al. 1992, 23). Thus, a curriculum could be equated with a syllabus, or, to use the German word, Lehrplan – plan and program of the particular subject. Concepts of curriculum in language education have focused on the distinction between syllabus and curriculum, for there has been the confusion over the distinction between the two terms. It is a common belief that a curriculum includes a syllabus, but not vice versa (Dubin and Olshtain 1986, 3). For example, in Britain, a syllabus refers to 'the content or subject matter of an individual subject', whereas curriculum means 'the totality of content to be taught and aims to be realized within one school or educational system' (White 1988, 4). On the contrary, in the South Eastern European countries a curriculum is usually equated with a syllabus (Radó 2010, 115), which is relevant for this study, since it is conducted in Serbia. Based on the theoretical framework discussed above in this paper the term curriculum is operationally defined as follows: Curriculum is the plan for subject matter, which includes the goals, objectives, content and resources.

While many studies have been undertaken on curriculum implementation in language education,<sup>10</sup> the same does not apply to studies focusing on Latin curricula. It is generally accepted that there are positive correlations between foreign-language achievement and individual difference measures, such as attitudes and motivation, language anxiety, self-confidence etc. However, there is still a lack of research on the relationship between foreign-language achievement and other parts of the teaching and learning process, such as curriculum, and this study hopes to fill this gap. Taking this statement as a point of departure, let us describe the context of the study, its research questions and design.

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<sup>10</sup> There has been an increasing interest in English as a second language (ESL) curriculum implementation (Beretta 1990, Fox 2005).

#### 4. The context of the study

The research context is that of Serbian secondary education, where the educational and value system, cultural background, and teaching and learning environments have their own characteristics.

In Serbian gymnasiums Latin teachers usually teach 12 to 18 teaching-hours per week,<sup>11</sup> and each teaching-hour consists of 45 minutes. There are usually between 20 and 30 students in each class (see Table 1). Between 1991 and 2003, two Latin textbooks were published, and nowadays only the textbook written by Pakiž and Dimitrijević (2003) is widely used in most Serbian gymnasiums. There are two types of Latin learners: foreign languages majors (marked with the letter F in this study) and non-foreign languages majors. While a small number of students are enrolled in a foreign language program, non-foreign languages majors constitute the majority of gymnasium students specializing in other disciplines, such as mathematics and social sciences. For all students in Serbian gymnasiums a study of Latin for at least one year is mandatory, whereas only foreign languages majors have Latin during their entire secondary schooling, i.e. four years. At the beginning of the nineties, when Latin experienced its revival to Serbian gymnasiums, education policy makers must have thought that it would be useful to encourage students from foreign language classes (F) to learn Latin thoroughly, including details not suitable for all learners, and to give them more time to accomplish this goal.<sup>12</sup>

#### 5. Research questions and objectives

The initial idea for this research occurred to me when I realized that, despite the fact that all first graders at Serbian gymnasiums learn Latin

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<sup>11</sup> It depends on whether they teach in foreign language classes or not. If they do, then they teach 12 hours per week.

<sup>12</sup> It must be said that a discrepancy often exists between what was intended and what is enacted (Bekalo and Welford 2000). Therefore, the curriculum implementation is more complex than it is usually perceived (Fullan and Stiegelbauer 1991). Policymakers may produce policies with good intentions, but unforeseen and unwanted results may occur.

twice a week during the whole school year,<sup>13</sup> there is a significant difference in their Latin curricula. The students from the so-called foreign language classes (marked with the letter F in this study) have a smaller scope of grammar units, and a smaller defined vocabulary than all the other students – the difference is as big as a quarter of the whole grammar and vocabulary defined for the first-grade Latin course. In my opinion, this fact alone deserves some attention and calls for an investigation of its potential consequences on the teaching and learning process.

This study seeks to elucidate the following research questions:

- Does a difference in Latin curriculum – its scope and content – result in differences in students' attitudes and achievement?
- What is the impact of Latin curriculum design in the teaching and learning process?

## 6. Research design

This paper is based on a study undertaken in the gymnasium 'Stevan Sremac' in Niš. It is therefore a case study, within the specific context of the educational system in Serbia. Nevertheless, its findings might be of interest to Latin teachers, teacher trainers, and foreign language policymakers in other countries as well.

Although the subtitle of the present paper ('An Empirical Investigation') might suggest that this study is grounded in the field of experimental research, its design reveals some sources of experimental invalidity as well (Campbell and Stanley 1966, 8). To begin with, since this study is the one-shot case study, it lacks a repeated-testing setting which became standard in educational research. Secondly, there was no control of intersession history between the experimental groups, and thus unique events in different sessions (the obstreperous joke, the fire

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<sup>13</sup> In this research I decided to exclude evidence from the two specialized classes for Classics in Serbia – the first is at the Philological Gymnasium in Belgrade, and the second is at the Gymnasium in Karlovci (founded in 1791, located in Vojvodina), because I think that their curricula in Classics and a comparison with the curricula in other gymnasiums should be the topic for a separate investigation.

across the street, the experimenter's introductory remarks, etc.)<sup>14</sup> might have an impact on the results of the investigation. In order to minimize the effects of this source of invalidity, we tried to randomize of experimental occasions – the investigation was completed within two school days in June 2016, at the same time of the day. Thirdly, although instrumentation was controlled by providing the fixed instrument such as printed test, experimenters/collectors of data were few enough (only two of them) not to be randomly assignable. In my opinion, the fact that both of them (marked with the letter A and the letter B) were engaged in the investigation of the two social studies classes (marked with the letter S1 and the letter S2) minimize this disadvantage, as illustrated in Table 1 (see below).

In this study I employed a 'mixed methods' approach,<sup>15</sup> i. e. both quantitative and qualitative components are incorporated into the research, but they are not given equal status – quantitative components prevail, and I see it as something that should be improved in future research. Namely, the necessity of case study methodology, preferably with qualitative approach, was not something that I started with, but rather came to that later, along with preparing the instrument. At the beginning I thought that it would be enough to have a quantitative approach based on an analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedures. After sharing my thoughts with my colleagues, Ivana Jeremić and Jelena Joksimović,<sup>16</sup> I realized that if I would proceed with that strategy, I would get just statistics, graphics and numbers, without real teaching and learning experiences. Thus, I have added an open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire.

The data consisted of the questionnaire given to students coupled with documents to address the intended Latin curricula and Latin textbooks. Since no ready-made questionnaire was available for me to

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<sup>14</sup> I borrow these examples from Campbell and Stanley (1966), 14.

<sup>15</sup> Mixed methods research has been defined as 'the class of research where the research mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study' (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004, 17). The use of multiple methods to study a single problem is essential to verify the research findings (Creswell 2003).

<sup>16</sup> In the first footnote of this paper I have given their university affiliations.



use in the testing, I designed most of it myself. The questionnaire consists of three parts. The first part records participants' marks (average mark and mark in Latin, English and Serbian). The second part tests the sample with a short combined Latin test (vocabulary, understanding and producing sentences) entitled *Language mosaic*.<sup>17</sup> The purpose of the Latin test was to assess students' achievement, to compare them with students' attitudes, and eventually to improve Latin teaching in accordance with the feedback. Accordingly, one of the main purposes of the Latin test was to measure the students' language foundation and their ability to use Latin.<sup>18</sup> The third part examines students' attitudes towards learning Latin, English and Serbian, and ends with an open-ended question. In addition, I collected the information about the scope and content of Latin curriculum for all groups of learners, as well as the textbooks used in the classroom.

## 7. Sample

The study was based on a sample of 146 first grade students, aged from 14 to 15, of both sexes (males 58 & females 88), enrolled in the different school programs at a gymnasium in Niš (Serbia). Six groups of

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<sup>17</sup> I found an inspiration for its design and inner logic in Mor-Sommerfeld (2002). *Language mosaic* is a new approach to foreign language learning, developed by Aura Mor-Sommerfeld from the University of Haifa (Israel). According to Mor-Sommerfeld, the *language mosaic* could be defined 'as both a style (the outcome) and the way (the process) of writing by a non-native (i.e. newcomer to a language) combining two or more languages and incorporating various scripts' (Mor-Sommerfeld 2002, 99), which is relevant for Latin learning, since the majority of Serbian students use Cyrillic letters when they communicate using their mother tongue. As it has been explained, 'the concept of language mosaic combines two elements: the relationship between first and second/new language (i.e. interlanguage, code-switching) and the process of the first stages of writing development in a new language' (Mor-Sommerfeld 2002, 99). Despite the fact that it was designed for young learners (primary school students), I think that some parts of it could be implemented in the future, improved Latin curricula for students in Serbian gymnasiums and elsewhere. The *language mosaic* could be seen as a game invented by teachers, and also by students.

<sup>18</sup> A number of tasks from the test is given in the Appendix.

Latin learners, i.e. six classes were selected for comparison: the first group was defined as Foreign languages (F), the second and the third as Social studies (S1 and S2), the fourth and the fifth Mathematics (M1 and M2), and the sixth Bilingual (B), concerning the differences in their school programs (see **Table 1**). I adopted a non-random sampling technique, referred to as purposive sampling, because its focus is to select ‘information-rich cases for study in depth’ (Patton 2002, 230). To have a larger pool of diverse informants who would be comparatively representative for the study, I included all first graders from the aforementioned gymnasium to participate. My assumption was that students might offer diverse answers due to the differences in their major subjects.

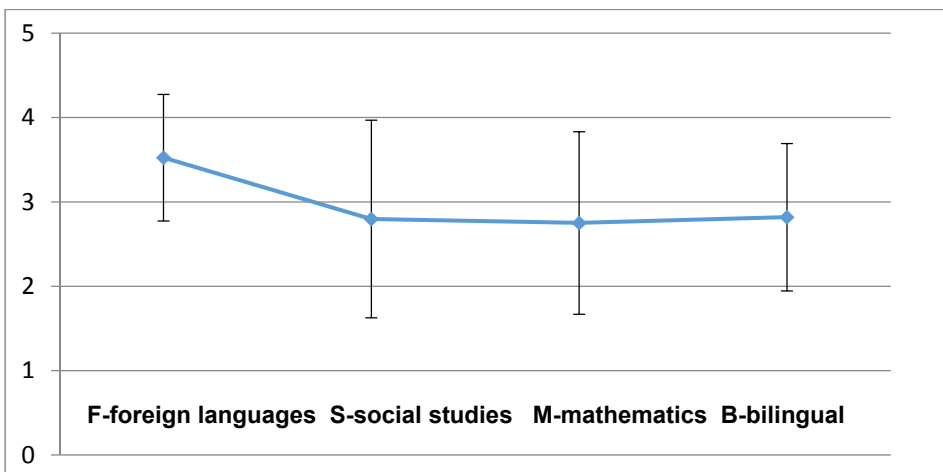
**Table 1**

CLASS	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	TEACHER
F (foreign languages)	21	A
S1 (social studies)	30	A
S2 (social studies)	31	B
M1 (mathematics)	27	B
M2 (mathematics)	26	B
B (bilingual: German)	11	A

## 8. Results

The employment of quantitative and qualitative analyses gave an answer about the relationship between Latin curriculum, students’ attitudes and achievement. Results of the ANOVA procedures showed significant differences between the F (foreign languages) group and all three other types of groups favoring the F group on all testing measures. This means that the students from the F class had both higher scores on the Latin test (*Language mosaic*) and exhibited more positive attitudes toward Latin learning, as it has been shown in **Figure 1** and **2**. Qualitative analyses of responses to the open-ended question confirmed the findings from quantitative research. From 146 students engaged in the study less than 25 percent gave their comment at the end of the questionnaire, and the majority of positive comments written in Serbian

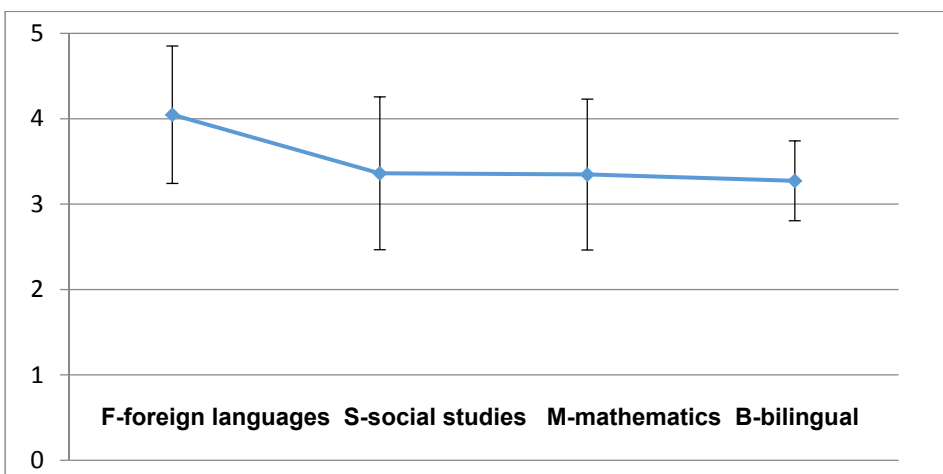
and/or even in Latin are made by the students from the F class. To conclude, this study shows a strong correlation between Latin curriculum, attitudes and achievement.



**Figure 1**

**The differences in students' perceived usefulness of learning Latin: 'Latin is useful',**

A 5-point Likert scale: 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - neither agree nor disagree, 4 - agree, 5 - strongly agree



**Figure 2**

**The differences in students' awareness of the similarities between Serbian and Latin: 'Serbian and Latin are similar in some aspects',**

A 5-point Likert scale: 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - neither agree nor disagree, 4 - agree, 5 - strongly agree

## 9. Conclusions and implications

Teaching and learning Latin is an idea whose time has not gone yet. But the Latin learning of tomorrow needs mutual support of Latin teachers, teacher trainers,<sup>19</sup> education researchers, education policy makers, and many others in the educational system.

This study is the first empirical study using both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore teaching and learning Latin in Serbian gymnasiums. It is relevant in at least two aspects. First, it provides an insight into the complexity of interrelations between Latin curricula, students' attitudes and achievement. Instead of exploring how a proposed curriculum has been experienced by teachers and students, it explores multidimensional and mutual influences between different elements of the teaching and learning process. Second, this study provides a lesson for future research conducted within the field of language curriculum in other Latin learning contexts. As language curricula share commonalities, research findings could also contribute to the understanding of the impact of curriculum on teaching and learning foreign languages.

While thinking about new Latin curricula, we could grasp some useful ideas, for example, from the *language mosaic* concept. In my opinion, this concept could improve students' creativity, their meta-linguistic awareness, reading-writing connections, and relationships between the first and second/new language. Furthermore, I think that there is a need for improvements of the instrument itself, by including much more qualitative data collection methods which may consist of key informants (e.g. teachers and selected groups of students), observations, gathering documents and materials related to the topic.

As rightly pointed out by an anonymous reading supervisor in a large school system, 'the days of a teacher getting a curriculum and putting her independent spin on it – those days are over'.<sup>20</sup> It is,

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<sup>19</sup> It must be stated that there is a problem of defining *teacher education* as a discipline. It lacks 'a consensual view, not only concerning what it is and what are its processes, but indeed the very language we employ to talk about it' (Grenfell, Kelly and Jones 2003, 21-22).

<sup>20</sup> It is cited from Shapiro (2013), 307.

therefore, becoming increasingly more important to generate quality curricula (Stabback 2016). Developing quality Latin curricula seems to be even more challenging, having in mind all prejudices connected with teaching and learning Latin in the twenty first century.

## Appendix

### SELECTED PARTS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

#### LATIN FOR BEGINNERS

**Introductory note:** This questionnaire has been drafted for research purposes. Please think thoroughly and answer the questions as best as you can. Note that answers should be given anonymously and that you will not be assessed from them...

#### The Data

1. What will your (expected) final average mark be at the end of this school year? Circle 1-5

1      2      3      4      5

2. What will be your (expected) final mark in Latin at the end of this school year? Circle 1-5

1      2      3      4      5

#### Language mosaic

Please fill in all fields:

	Serbian	English	Latin
1		(to) have	
2			culina
3		difficult	
4	победа ( <i>victory</i> )		
1			Veni, vidi, vici!
2		He came to Rome.	

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