



## TEACHERS', PUPILS' AND PARENTS' OPINIONS ON PRIMARY TEXTBOOKS: THEIR SELECTION, QUALITY AND USE

Elena Lalău

**Abstract:** Textbooks' importance and usefulness in primary education is emphasized in the literature. Our interest for this subject was determined by the opinion that, if the textbooks are well-chosen, being taken into account the users' opinions, then the textbook achieves its goal: it becomes not only a source of information and a tool for pupils, but also an orientate guide for parents and teachers. This research aimed to investigate the opinions of teachers, parents and pupils regarding the quality and usefulness of working textbooks, respectively on how to choose the textbooks. Subjects underline the importance of having a variety of alternative textbooks, well designed and ensuring freedom of teachers in choosing textbooks. Moreover, respondents considered important that publishers and Ministry of education to consult teachers on the quality of school textbooks.

**Key words:** textbooks, primary education, evaluation criteria, research.

### 1. Introduction

Starting with school year 1998-1999, with the Curricular Reform from Romania, the new National Curriculum has been introduced. It includes the curriculum, the syllabi, the performance evaluation descriptors in primary school the alternative textbooks.

In the present study we will refer at textbooks. According to its definition, the textbook presents information about a particular domain, in a selective and attractive manner, respecting the objectives and the contents scheduled in the syllabus, these been adapted to the age and to the intellectual level of students.

Being an official document, a textbook has to respect a set of criteria (scientific, psychopedagogical, hygienic, aesthetic, etc.), established by pedagogical literature (Bernard, Clement & Carvalho, 2007; Bruillard & Baron, 1998; Cucos, 2002; Jonnaert, 2009; Seguin, 1989 quoted by Cucos, 2002).

Taking into account textbooks' importance and usefulness in primary education, this research aims to investigate the opinions of teachers, parents and pupils regarding the quality and usefulness of working textbooks, respectively on how to choose the textbooks.

The choice of this subject was determined by the opinion that, if the textbooks are well-chosen, being taken into account the users' opinions, then the textbook achieves its goal: it becomes not only a source of information and a tool for pupils, but also an orientate guide for parents and teachers.

### 2. Textbooks and curricular auxiliaries

#### 2.1 Textbooks' and curricular auxiliaries' functions

According to the dictionaries, **the textbook** is „a book, used especially in schools, that contains a brief presentation of a subject's or an art's concepts”. (Noodex, Dex)

„Textbooks' goal is to facilitate learning activities achieved by student in school and extra-school environment”(Cristea, 2004, p.81). They are „an official document of education policy that ensures the program realization in a form that relate to the knowledge and skills at the systemic level, through

*various teaching units, operationalized in specifically structured chapters, subchapters, lessons, learning sequences* "(Cristea, 2004, p.300). The textbook can be presented as a *typewritten study book, xeroprinted, lithographed or printed for each educational discipline* (Bontaş, 2007, p.118).

For a teacher, the textbook has only an orientation position in lesson preparation (beside other documentary sources he/she should use).

Therefore, the textbook has more functions: informative, formative, stimulative, of guidance, of organization and self-education (Nicola 2003, p.438; Seguin, 1989, p. 22-24 quote by Cucos, 2002, p.245). Gerard & Roegiers (1997, p.3) give details about the functions supporting the learning process:

- the function of informing and passing on the knowledge;
- the function of developing capabilities and skills leading to the acquisition of some methods, to the formation of some useful attitudes in life and at the working place;
- the function of consolidation and enrichment of acquisitions by exercises and tasks;
- the function of evaluation of acquisitions by different forms of evaluation (evaluation of diagnosis, formative, summative, of progress and process);
- the function of supporting the acquisitions integration and their appliance in life, by developing transversal skills;
- the function of reference: the pupil can report himself to the textbook to build arguments, to present proofs in his/her ideas support;
- the educative function: the textbook may contribute to the social and cultural education of pupils, pointing out attitudes valorized by society etc.

## 2.2 Typology of textbooks

Along with the insertion of National Curriculum and alternative textbooks, it comes to attention the concern for optimizing and diversifying textbooks.

Referring to textbooks' typology, Cucos (2002) suggests as first criterion the textbook addressee: textbook for pupil or textbook for teacher. Potolea & Manolescu (2006, p.123) find that both the pupil and the teacher textbook should represent a "package of education and study". Indeed, on the textbook market in Romania came out, initially, textbooks simultaneous with guidebooks for teachers but, at least in secondary school and upper secondary education, their life was quite short (for additional cost reasons for teachers).

Another classification criterion of textbooks is "the pedagogical method presumed by the textbook" (Roegiers, 2002, p.253). Under this criterion, we speak of a "programmed" textbook, which "comprises everything needed in education: information, method, exercises, evaluation etc.. At a lower stage, some textbooks offer a full set of activities which don't lead to other learning paths" (ibidem, p.5). Other category is represented by "the textbooks promoting the training through research or practical actions, problematized training, IAC" (Cristea, 2010, citing Mialaret, 1991).

Textbooks can be also classified, point Cucos (2002, p.253) and Cristea (2010, p.301), by the way of structuring and organizing the content. From this point of view, we speak about textbooks with "a closed universe" and textbooks which give the freedom of information assimilation from other sources outside the school space, also called "open textbooks".

A modern textbook is that with structured contents and educational strategies according, both to the preset operational objectives (Nicola, 2003, p.438) and general and specific competences.

The differences between the modern and the traditional textbook are described in the Methodological guide for implementation of educational syllabus (1998, p.18) and by Sacară & Dumitriu, 2007, p.74):

**Table 1.** Comparative analysis of traditional and modern textbooks

Analysis criteria	Traditional textbook	Modern textbook
The purpose of providing knowledge in the textbook	Acquisition of new knowledge	Skills development
Contents' selection mode	Contents' rigid selection (academic treatment)	Contents' permissive selection (variability, creative activities)
The type of information in the textbook	Standard, closed information, being an end in itself	Opened information, delivered as a way of skills, values and attitudes training
The type of learning proposed in the textbook	Learning based on memory capacity and replication	Learning based on comprehension and explanation
Knowledge developing instruments subscribed in the textbook	Instrument of formation the ideological cognition	Focus on critical reflection
Teaching - learning strategies proposed in the textbook	Expository strategies (knowledge sharing)	Interactive strategies (the pupil-textbook interaction)
Encouraged evaluation strategies	Summative evaluation	Different forms of evaluation: diagnostic, formative and progress one

### 2.3 Requirements and criteria regarding the quality of textbooks

In order to perform the listed functions, textbooks must comply with some scientific, psycho-pedagogical, hygienic, aesthetical, even economic requirements, like some different specialized works mention (Radu & Ezechil, 2006, p.94; Jinga & Istrate, 2001, p.215; Dumitriu & Dumitriu, 2003, p.266-267):

- *scientific requirements*: concern the scientific quantity and quality of information, their value, the conformity between textbook and syllabus, the avoidance of scientific errors, the coherence in presenting the information, the need for interdisciplinary approach;
- *psychological requirements*: appreciate if the textbooks correspond to the pupils' age characteristics, stimulate the creative thinking and the learning by discovery, give freedom of expression to the pupils in the learning process, motivate them;
- *pedagogical requirements*: evaluate the content from the perspective of information and formation, check if the information is processed after certain accessibility, transparency, flexibility criteria and if the individual study methodology is well established;
- *hygienic requirements*: refer to the legibility of texts and images, to the printing ink and paper quality and also to the textbook format;
- *aesthetical requirements*: concern the typing, the cover and the illustrations quality, the presence and use of the annex, the way colors are combined and the graphical layout;
- *economic requirements*: evaluate the textbook costs and the using resistance.

To develop the thinking, memory and attention processes, in the textbook elaboration, regardless of discipline, the content has:

- a) to be essentialized and explicit;
- b) to avoid the historical approach;
- c) to stimulate "the epistemic curiosity and tension" of pupils so they also take information from another sources (Bontaş, 2007, p.118).

All these requirements must be respected and taken into account by the authors, both, in the projection and analysis of a textbook.

### 2.4 Curricular auxiliaries and their typology

In Romanian education, the syllabus go with application guides (National Curriculum for compulsory education, Frame of reference, CNC, MEN, 1998 and National Curriculum, Curriculum for pre-

university education, CNC, MEN,1999). These documents “explicit the directions, the principles and the structures of action, (through concrete examples) and facilitate the orientation of Romanian education through directions visualized by deciders” (Cucoş, 2002, p.255). The content of curricular auxiliaries is in accordance with the legal, active provisions. Teachers can select and use in their class these curricular auxiliaries, “on the basis of professional free initiative, in order to improve the educational process” (Art. 69/LEN, nr.1/2011).

A kind of textbook for teachers is the methodology or “specialized teaching” as Negreţ-Dobridor (2008, p.231) name them. Methodologies are made for each education discipline and are published in different publishing houses.

The portfolio or the teacher's/schoolmaster's notebook is a teacher auxiliary, needed in the organization and structuring of the contents and in the evaluation and self-evaluation of pupils. These are drawn on years of study and forms, comprise the syllabus for all disciplines for the specific class, including facultative classes, indicative calendar planning, the schedule, different evaluation instruments which can be adapted and applied to the class, observation sheets for the behavior of the student and datasheets for the registration of results, examples of evaluation samples, planning of the extracurricular activities etc

Beside these documents, teachers can also use in the class different anthologies of literary texts, songs or school festivities, chrestomathies, workbooks or sets of problems. These teacher assets contain a large amount of knowledge and information, to help teachers illustrate and supplement different topics, exercises and problems, suggestions for practical works, methodological recommendations relating to the methods and means used in the class, examples of other cultural and extracurricular activities.

Along with the publication of auxiliary textbooks for teachers there were edited auxiliaries for pupils, supplementing the textbook, avoiding the overdraft (by multiple and various new knowledge approach and practice situations). They come to support the pupils, not only for the practical and independent activities, but also for the creative actions or activities in observing the environment.

Teachers can also choose for the use of some teaching aids in class the “Students' portfolio” in science, practical skills or visual arts, “Reading class auxiliaries” etc. These auxiliary works have different sheets with pictures and information for guiding the students in making practical articles differently etc. Beside these auxiliaries, we can also use in the class albums, atlases, maps, specialized magazines for teachers and students, monographs and testing knowledge compendiums. With the education computerization, came out different software and educational programs, educational games, information materials, CDs or audiovisual materials in supporting the pupils' learning by interactive individual or group activities.

These auxiliaries, like textbooks, have to respect some writing requirements, correspond to some criteria and advisory indicators (established by inspectorate).

As a conclusion, it is up to the teacher the choice of textbooks and auxiliaries for the age and intellectual level of pupils who he or she works with. Nevertheless, teachers must not make abuse of these materials, their acquisition being generally the responsibility of parents.

### **3. Research method**

#### **3.1. Research design**

The main objective of the research was to analyze the quality of current textbooks and auxiliaries used in primary education: the content, the structure and the pictures' quality analysis and formulation of some recommendations designed to optimize them.

The specific objectives of the research are:

- Design of tools for collecting information on the quality of textbooks for the target group of users.
- Collecting and interpreting information on the quality of textbooks for the target group of users.

- Collecting suggestions to improve the quality of textbooks after analyzing the results.

The research was ascertaining, consisting in a questionnaire-based survey and two interviews with parents and pupils. The research took place during the school year 2013-2014 in Secondary School Buhalnița, Neamț County and other schools in the country (Cluj, Sibiu and Bistrița Năsăud).

The subjects involved in this research were teachers, pupils and parents. In the *questionnaire survey* were involved 50 teachers, which are studying at „Babeș-Boylai” University, at Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences. To the research, took also part two methodologists, expert teachers, aged 45-50 years, from both rural and urban areas.

Interviews were conducted with parents and students, in groups of 5 people in each category.

Interviews with students were conducted with the consent and in the presence of parents. Here attended 15 students in the fourth grade from the School Buhalnița, Commune Hangu, Neamț County. The interviews were performed using an interview guide consisting of five questions. Students were chosen based on the fact that, having ages between 9 and 10, they can express coherently their opinions about textbooks they have used during the 4 years. Students were divided into groups of 5 to respond effectively to questions and not to be influenced in the answers by each other.

All subjects agreed for their answers to be used in research anonymously and confidentially.

### 4.3. Demographic data

Among those surveyed 48 were female, i.e. a percentage of 96.0% and only 2 male, i.e. a percentage of 0.40 %, which shows a higher percentage of females working in the education system and concerned with the children's education.

The number of respondents from the two categories, teachers and pupils is as follows: 42 are teachers of the 4 counties practicing in education system, some of them being also students, and the remaining 8 are students with no job in any system. Subjects were between 20 and 50 years old or over 50, most subjects having more than 6 years seniority in the department.

**Table 2.** Subjects' age distribution

Age range	20 – 26 years old	27 – 32 years old	33 – 38 years old	39 – 44 years old	45 – 50 years old	More than 50 years old	Total
Number	7	8	12	6	10	7	50

**Table 3.** Teaching experience

Intervals	Less than 5 years	Between 6 and 15 years	Between 15 and 25 years	Between 26 and 38 years	Total
Number	16	12	17	5	50

Of the 42 teachers participating in the investigation, 21 obtained first professional degree, 8 obtained second degree, 5 had final degree and 8 teachers are without degrees.

School location or respondents' domicile is relatively balanced, so 29 subjects are residing or working in a school in urban area and 21 are residing in rural areas or working in a rural school.

Respondents were both with high school studies (pedagogic high school or other educational colleges) and higher education. 13 subjects (26%) had secondary education, 33 (66%) had higher education; having completed their higher education and 4 (8%) did not specify the form of studying.

Another interview was conducted with 20 parents of the pupils in the III<sup>rd</sup> and IV<sup>th</sup> class, female, all from rural area, residing in the village Buhalnița, Neamț, aged between 27 and 40 years old, with primary and secondary education, of which only five were working, the rest being workers in their own household. Parents were divided into groups of 5 to answer questions and to not be influenced in expressing their opinions.

**Table 4.** Parents' age

Parents' age	27-30 years old	31-35 years old	36-40 years old
Parents' number	6	7	7
Percentage	30%	35%	35%

As we can observe, the parents interviewed are young parents and their number after age ranges are nearly equal. Parents who have been interviewed have both primary and secondary studies. Most parents have a high school education (11) and secondary (7), no parent having higher education and two parents with only primary education, for personal reasons.

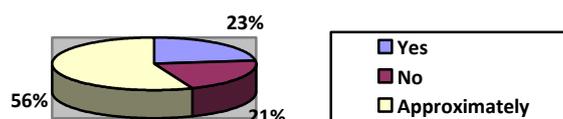
### 3.3. Instruments

The instruments used in research are based on Seguin's criteria (1989, quoted by Cucos, 2002). The questionnaire contains, besides requesting demographic data, 16 items addressing different aspects related to textbooks. The first 6 are with multiple choice answer and the following 9 are the Likert-type. All these items require also the argument of answers. The last question has multiple choice answers and requires the expression of opinions on how to improve textbooks.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Teachers' opinion on the textbooks' quality for primary education

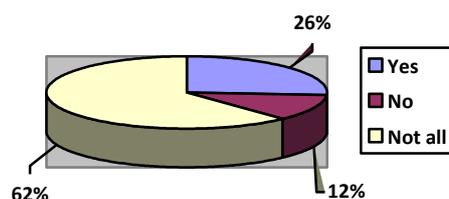
So, at the first item where respondents had to say whether *the content of the textbooks covers the national curriculum components*, the responses were as follows:



**Figure 1.** Respondents' opinion regarding the correspondence between the textbook's content and the National Curricula

Analyzing this figure, we observe that most respondents who answered YES believe that the content of textbooks is in accordance with the curriculum, but the textbooks do not entirely comply with the program specifications (objectives/skills, number of hours, themes, chapters and their structure), requiring revised and adapted curriculum improvements. Those peoples that said NO, argued that the choice for the reply stated the following: there is little need for skills training exercises required under the syllabus; first grade this year worked after the new curriculum, but with old books; it deals contents from other various textbooks or materials, too little content to those presented in the curriculum; the number of hours is sometimes insufficient for approaching some contents. Those who responded *approximately*, argue their answer as follows: the textbook contains incompletely treated themes; sometimes contents do not cover or exceed the curriculum; the new first class syllabus is not related to the contents and number of hours of old textbooks, the textbook is just a reference for parents to see the teaching line, what are their children studying etc.

In item 2, where respondents had to say whether *existing textbooks have also additional materials, guides*, the following responses were given:



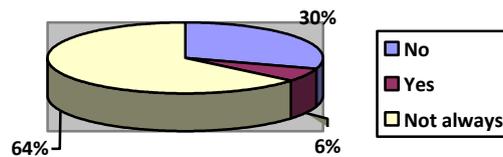
**Figure 2.** Respondents' opinion concerning the existence

of additional materials attached to textbooks

The answers received from most subjects illustrate the frustration that they face with: yes, there are auxiliaries, but they are bought from their own money (most of the answers). Other received responses are: not all publishers offer complementary materials; there are well-developed textbooks that do not require auxiliaries; they are useful and necessary, complete the content of the manual; it is necessary that additional material to be distributed with textbooks and guides or auxiliary models, both in schools and bookshops. The responses to the question *whether the textbook content is respected or not in class work* were: 9 **No** replies (18%), 8 **Yes** replies (16%) and 33 responses **Not always** (66%).

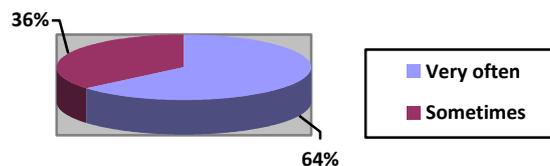
Arguments provided by respondents who believe that the content of the textbook is not respected, are the following: it is important to respect the curriculum completed by the textbook; the content must be adapted to the pupils' level and learning style; the content of some textbooks do not support enough the development and skills training required under the syllabus; currently, the textbook is considered to be a support, as auxiliaries are; textbooks are an indicative program, the curriculum has to be respected; in teaching, the textbook is the basis, but the content is diversified and there are used other sources, too.

In item 4 – *In working classes with pupils is always respected the structure suggested in the textbook for activities?* were obtained 3 answers **Yes**, 15 answers **No** and 32 **Not always** (Figure 3). More than half of the answers were for **Not always**, with arguments such as: No, because the structure of activities doesn't always match with the class level; it is important to understand the content and this is where the teacher's creativity comes, he has the freedom to propose learning activities that foster achieving the goals which he or she has set and support the student in the learning process; there are activities that, because of insufficient material base, cannot be conducted as structured in the textbook.



**Figure 3.** Subjects' opinion concerning the extent to which teachers respect in the class the structure of the textbook activities

In item 5, respondents had to say whether *they use in class other visual aids besides textbooks*. They chose and argued only two of the three options, the **Never** option was not chosen by any person.

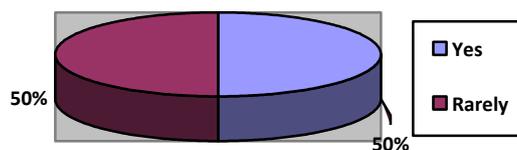


**Figure 4.** Teachers' responses concerning the frequency of using auxiliaries

The reasons for using auxiliaries **sometimes** or **very often** presented as follows: *current education makes auxiliaries necessary for completing tasks, for students' differentiated and individual work (most of the answers); auxiliaries offer a variety of exercises that are attractive, supports the strengthening of the taught knowledge; if textbooks are poor in applications, auxiliaries offer activities for developing the creative thinking and the imagination of children with potential.* For the reasons listed emerges the importance of using auxiliaries and the poor content of some textbooks that do not satisfy the curriculum requirements and objectives.

To highlight *the freedom of choosing alternative textbooks by teachers*, to item 6 all respondents opted for two answers, **yes** and **rarely** (the **never** option was not chosen). From the results, it appears that the number of people who claim that there is freedom in choosing textbooks is equal to the number of

respondents with **rarely**. It seems that, what matters is the school board's attitude that gives or not to the headmaster or to the teacher the freedom in choosing schoolbooks (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Teachers' opinion concerning their freedom in choosing textbooks

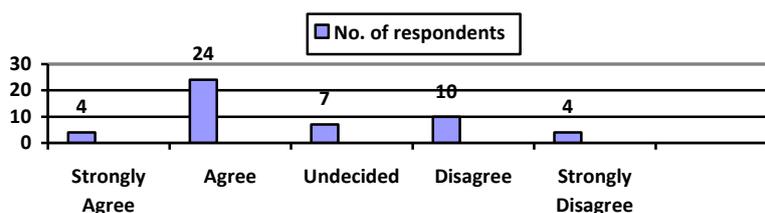
We are presenting, in following lines, the arguments provided by respondents:

**Table 5.** The arguments of subjects concerning their freedom to choose a textbook

Yes	Rarely
It depends on the school, it is left to the teacher to choose the textbook	There are used existing textbooks from their old peers, teachers
The first books were chosen indeed in 2004-2005, then they became <i>unique</i> .	There are kept the options of fellows who taught in previous classes.
After consulting the curriculum, it is chosen the best textbook, if any in the school or inspectorate offer.	Even if they are chosen, the used textbooks are those who come from school deposits.
Usually, it is set at committee level the option for a specific textbook.	There are affinities for certain publishing houses, promoted by school inspectorate.

In the following 9 questions, the respondents had used the value scale, with the following values: *strongly agree*, *agree*, *undecided*, *disagree* and *strongly disagree*, arguing and circling the chosen variant.

In item 7, subjects were asked to choose and to argue the answer to the statement: *the scientific content of the textbook responds to the students' learning needs*. The most respondents (24) partially agree (figure 6). Some of these **arguments** refer to the fact that *content informs and does not propose to students' tasks that challenge them to think, to be creative, to observe and investigate; workloads are boring or unrelated to everyday life; there are in textbooks research and observation activities that require the use of some materials or equipment missing from school provision*.



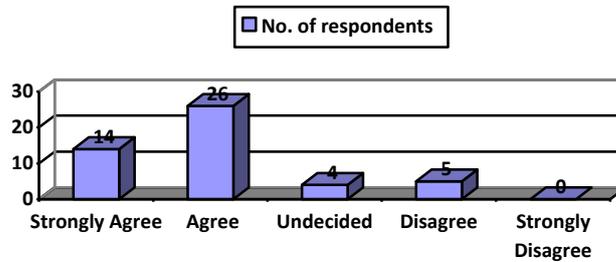
**Figure 6.** Subjects' opinion concerning the students' satisfaction in using textbooks

In item 8, *the learning activities shown in the textbook are designed in terms of focusing the learning process on student*, the options of the respondents were: 21 Agree, 3 Strongly Agree, 10 Disagree, 9 Undecided and 7 Strongly disagree.

*Some of their arguments were: student-focus learning is not yet well understood by teachers; textbooks are old and curricula are constantly changing; the focus on student involves his/her direct work to experiment, to make direct observations, which are related again to the material resources, too poor in some schools; in the textbook, there are very few such recommendations of activities, e.g. there are not found differential learning activities.*

The statement *in the structure of textbook activities, there are updating, implementation, evaluation and knowledge systematization tasks* has been appreciated as follows: most responses (26 respondents i.e. 52 %) were *agree*, 14 subjects (28%) expressed *strongly agreement*, and for *undecided* and *disagree* there were 4 and 5 answers. No subject has *strongly disagreed*. These results analysis shows that in the textbooks there are update, systematization, implementation and evaluation tasks, but they are present only in small numbers or have unsatisfying quality.

The same distribution of answers is registered to item 10: *Evaluation activities facilitate formative, summative and progress evaluation.*

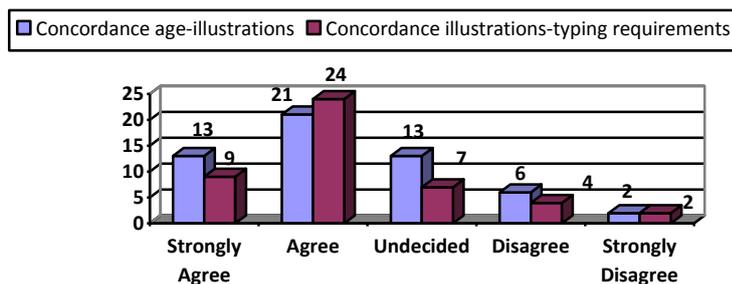


**Figure 7.** Subjects' opinions on how textbook's activities facilitate students' assessment

In item 11, where respondents were assigned to value the claim *Textbooks respect the drafting, language and style requirements*, the following results were recorded: *strongly agreement* – 11 answers, *partial agreement* - 28 answers, *impartial* - 6 responses, *partial disagreement* -3 answers and *strongly disagreement* - 2 replies.

From the large number of choices given to *strongly agreement* and *partial agreement* scales for this item and to arguments (being outdated models, the exercise requirements are exceeded, sometimes there are language mistakes or language is too difficult, or too lofty for children), it is found that existing textbooks respect, but not totally, those drafting, language and style requirements required in making a textbook.

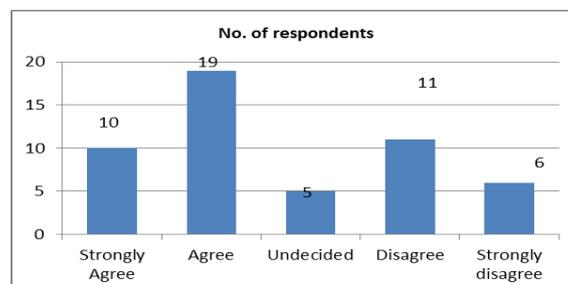
Items 12 and 13 have requested students' opinion on: *illustrations in primary textbooks are consistent with the editing requirements and the age of the pupils*. For the 5 values of the two items have been various choices (Figure 8).



**Figure 8.** Respondents' opinion concerning the concordance of illustrations with typing requirements and pupils' age.

Of the two comparative representations we see that illustrations in primary textbooks do not totally respect the writing requirements and are not all consistent with the age of the students, so there were exposed some arguments: *some pages are too colored, others are unclear or too small; some textbooks have fancy colors; the image is representative for a sequence or a lesson.*

Through item 14, it was intended to see if *alternative textbooks facilitate the differentiated education of students*, for which different responses were obtained (Figure 9). Once again, the answers and arguments refer to the real quality of textbooks, to activities that do not always focus on students' differential education, the teacher being the one who proposes, adapts and applies such activities according to students' cognitive level.



**Figure 9.** Respondents' opinion on textbooks' facilitation regarding differentiated education of pupils

In item 15, respondents had appreciated the statement that *the information presented in the textbooks applies in everyday life*. Subjects responses are: *agree* (22), *disagree* (13), *strongly agree* (7), *undecided* (6) and *strongly disagree* (2). The choices and the arguments of these answers highlight that the focus is not on the practical application of knowledge from textbooks in everyday life, through concrete examples, but on the predominance of theoretical knowledge.

The last question in the questionnaire - *What measures do you think they can be taken to improve textbooks?* was applied for getting subjects' opinions leading to the establishment of some measures or suggestions to improve the quality of textbooks to be presented and analyzed in a next chapter.

#### 4.2. Parents' opinion regarding the quality of primary textbooks – interview

Parents' opinions are important, because they are directly involved in the education of pupils by helping them in homework and other learning activities.

Parents were receptive and open to give objective responses, which were written down and processed.

So, to the first question, *Does the information from textbooks help students enough in their learning activity?*, parents gave different answers: *The information of textbooks helps them learning, if properly explained by the teacher or taught diligently* (6 parents); *The information of textbooks does not always help them, we also work with other sources* (5 parents); *Textbooks knowledge help a little, it is necessary to bring completions* (6 parents); *The concepts from textbooks forms the basis of knowledge, but they have to be supplied with some additional information* (3 parents). From these responses, it means that the content presented in textbooks is sometimes insufficient for students in their learning activity, so parents and students are using also other information from different sources.

*Whether homework can only be solved using the concepts of the textbook or other information sources?* is the second question parents responded to. 18 parents specified that they are using *other sources* to help their children with homework: *the Internet, compendiums, magazines or guidebooks*, although *the themes of textbooks should be solved only by using concepts from the textbook*, said a parent. Two of the slower learners' parents responded that *the issues can be resolved only with the textbook*.

The third question was intended to express the views of parents about the fact that many of them *consider some topics of the textbook very intractable, not only for themselves, but also for their children*. Of the 20 parents, 16 responded that they faced situations when they could not solve some of their children's homework exercises; many were too complex or do not correspond with what they have learned in school, the curriculum is overloaded; the textbook used more cumbersome language; 3

of the parents do not consider homework complex, they say that they and their children could resolve it.

To the fourth question, parents had to answer to this: - *What can you say about the books' look, on the image and covers quality, on the volume and size of some of them?* This time their answers were also different. 4 parents believe that books are well made, but 16 complained about the images that sometimes are not very clear, do not render precisely the text content, images are too small or too few. Parents have complaints about the fact that some of the textbooks are too large in size, thick and heavy; paper is of poor quality, it breaks fast, some sheets fall right away because of their badly stuck; covers are too thin. Four of the 16 parents said that some textbooks are untidy, worn, sources of communicable diseases for children, because they are used by several generations.

The last question followed expressing opinions about *the textbooks improvements the parents consider necessary to be made*. These responses will be presented in the summary at the end of the article. From the responses received from parents, it appears that not all textbooks meet all requirements for achieving a textbook and improvements can be made.

#### 4.3. Pupils' opinion regarding the quality of primary textbooks – interview

Pupils' opinions about their preferred or non-preferred textbooks targeted issues such as: illustrations purpose, what improvements can be made to textbooks or how textbooks will look in the future.

At first question - *Which of your books is easier or more interesting to work with? Why?*, pupils gave answers based on their favorite subjects, some of them specifying 2 favorite textbooks, motivating their choice, which is shown in the table below:

**Table 6.** Pupils' favorite textbooks - arguments

Favorite textbooks	No. of pupils	Arguments
Romanian	5	It has nice exercises, interesting texts, large print; it has also pictures and sheets that are not fragile
Sciences	3	Pictures, observation exercises and experiments
Mathematics	3	Both, difficult and easy exercises; also it has pictures
French	2	Various exercises and images from France
History	2	It evokes our country's past, it has pictures with our ancestors and non-breakable covers
Geography	1	It has maps, even if they are not quite big, and non-breakable covers
Civic education	3	It teaches me how to behave, it has images and it is like a notebook, not too big.

As shown, most favorite student textbooks are Romanian, Mathematics and Science. On question 2, *with what textbook you don't like to work? Why?*, again students gave different answers, listed two books, depending on how it looks, what are its contents, how big are the covers, etc. (Table 7).

**Table 7.** Textbooks that pupils do not prefer

Textbooks I do not prefer	No. of pupils	Reasons/Arguments
Mathematics	5	It has difficult exercises without explanation, sheets are very fragile
History	2	There are not written more data
Geography	2	It has not more evident maps, it is too big
Civic Education	1	It has also uninteresting things
Romanian	3	It has too long texts, too small pictures, too many pages
French	2	It is hard, with complex exercises
Sciences	2	It has not many, precise images, and the covers are easily-breakable
Music	1	It has concepts that I do not understand

At the third question -*How would look books without pictures? What do you think images are used for?* 13 of 15 pupils responded that *without pictures, textbooks would not be so interesting, they would be boring, unattractive and they would look like reading books from the library.* 2 pupils responded that too many images would distract them from the text and cannot focus on what is shown in the textbook.

The content of the fourth question was: *what suggestions are you proposing for students' textbooks improvement?* Responses were different, most referring to colorful and attractive images (4 replies), texts on their meaning (4 replies), suitable dimensions (3 answers), tensile strength, thick covers, lower volume (4 responses). These issues will be detailed, along with teachers and parents proposals in a separate chapter.

Last question- *How do you want to look textbooks in the future?* Every student exposed his or her opinion, most of the answers were related to the appearance (more resistant, better sheets and covers), to the size (not to be so large), to the clarity of images (real and vivid images); they have to be new each year, 5 of them proposing that textbooks have to be a tablet, with interactive lessons, because they will no longer carry so many books in the satchel.

Responses resulting from this interview will be processed and analyzed together with the answers given by parents, from which it will be established a set of recommendations for improving the quality of textbooks.

## 5. Conclusion and suggestions for improving the quality of the textbooks

As it is known, in 1998 there appeared the alternative textbooks „which are prepared in accordance with the same goals of educational reform, promoting differentiation and personalization of teaching ", as specified in the document *National Program for developing the teachers evaluation skills* (p.12, <http://www.isjbacau.ro/compartimentcurriculum/geografie/arhivă/curs/decee>).

*The schoolbook* is the main tool of the pupil in the learning process and a guide for teachers, being developed in accordance with the curriculum in order to achieve educational goals. Therefore, it must respect a set of requirements to prove its utility.

### Recommendations

- correlation with the curriculum, general and specific competences;
- reviewing books involve highly experienced teachers within the department, specialists in the field and in teaching, more scientific rigor of the referees in the domain; reviewers to be in large numbers (not just up to 3).
- ensuring consistency - the contents of the intellectual and cognitive experience of students;
- focusing learning activities on students, on practical, observation, experimentation and investigation activities, on problem solving, on entertaining and interdisciplinary activities.
- presentation and processing (scientific and educational) content so that students be captivated, interested in content and work with pleasure;
- using a scientifically correct, but accessible language for students;
- the existence of numerous fixation, systematization, self evaluation goals, of numerous sequential and final evaluations, with examples of differential treatment of students;
- improvement of graphics quality, image review, text size, font and paper quality;
- reduce the textbook's size or volume;
- textbooks not to be transmitted because of the hygiene and children's health;
- analysis of textbooks and auxiliary abroad and taking best practices identified in them.
- freedom of textbooks' choice by teachers;

- consultation of parents and students opinions, of teachers' using textbooks in class regarding issues used in textbooks.

Finally, we wish to show that in textbooks' evaluation, they should be involved not only academicians or teaching ministry commissions, but also teachers, parents and students that are interested in this.

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## Author

**Elena Lalau Name**, Master degree, Affiliation, BUHALNIȚA City, NEAMȚ Country, e-mail: e-mail address lalaelena@yahoo.com