Reading Fluency in Romanian Children with Language Related Learning Disabilities

Anamaria Carolina BODEA HAȚEGAN
Special Education Department, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca
Dorina Anca TALAŞ
Special Education Department, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca
Ana BUT
"Corneliu Coposu" School, Zalău

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Abstract: The aim of this research is to test the utility of an assessment and intervention instrument addressed to children with language related learning difficulties, focussed on improving reading fluency. This instrument was elaborated based on Romanian language structure specificity and the latest assessment and intervention strategies regarding reading fluency in the field. Thus, the main aspects taken into consideration when elaborating the instrument were: language structure, the nature of the linguistic material, timing, and repetition. The findings proved the fact that this instrument can be considered valuable, opening new research perspectives in the field of Romanian reading fluency.

Email: carolina.bodea.hategan@gmail.com; tdorina@yahoo.com

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Theoretical Background

Reading fluency is defined as a special skill for decoding words, in a fast and accurate manner, leading to word recognition and gaining the necessary time to allow the reader focus on the main idea of the text. There are two main theories underlining the conceptual core of reading fluency: the theory of language processing[1] and the theory of verbal efficiency[2] proposed by Perfetti.[3] Those two theories try to explain why automatic word recognition can greatly influence reading comprehension. These theories focus on decoding as the key element and on the amount of cognitive resources involved within the reading process. According to this view, attention and memory capacity are limited and the main cognitive factors predict the acquisition of functional reading abilities. As

[1] David LaBerge and S. Jay Samuels, "Toward a theory of automatic information processing in reading," *Cognitive Psychology* 62 (1974): 293-323.
[2] C.A. Perfetti, "The representation problem in reading acquisition," in *Reading acquisition*, ed. Ehri L.C., Treiman R. & Gough P.B.., (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum. 1992), 145–174.
[3] C.A. Perfetti, *Reading ability* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1985).

these cognitive factors are limited and a poor reader consumes a lot during word decoding and identification, little amount of resources remain for words and text comprehension. Both theories address reading abilities underlining that, although words retrieval and reading comprehension are two separate and sequential processes, they are very much connected. This connection is more likely to be identified in early reading acquisition stages, more exactly in elementary grades.[1],[2] This means that words decoded in a fast manner can predict reading comprehension, in the initial stages of developing reading skills, this prediction accuracy stating to fall after the forth elementary grade.

Mentioning a number of researches in this area, Wagner[3] underlines the fact that reading fluency has two important subcomponents, words reading fluency ("reading word lists") and passage, texts reading fluency. This means that reading fluency has to be improved not only at the word level, but also at the text level as "passage reading fluency generally being more strongly related with reading comprehension than is list reading fluency", especially in higher grades level.[4]

Reading fluency is a key component for reading comprehension,[5,6,7,8] thus this skill is very much connected with language structure as well as text structure. Hickey[9] also proves the fact that language specific elements are to be correlated with the child's reading fluency abilities. Hickey[10] proposes in a study a deeper analysis for several Irish words as reading fluency significantly correlates with the structure of the words.

The suprasegmental (prosodic) component is another element connected with reading fluency and comprehension. This phonological component refers to the reader`s ability: to read words and texts placing correctly the stress on the syllables, handling the word breaks and using a correct intonation pattern. In other words, the suprasegmental component within the reading process is addressed as: providing changes in pitch, respecting the stress structure of the words, chucking the phrases in such a way to make emphasis (in this way the words meaning can be completely based on the textual

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[1] Wagner R., "Assessment of word reading and reading fluency in English", in *Encyclopedia of Language and Literacy Development* (London, ON: Western University, 2011), 1–8.

2 H. Catts, T. Hogan and S. Adolf, "Developmental changes in reading and reading disabilities", in *Connections between language and reading disabilities*, ed. Catts, H. and Kamhi A. (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2005), 25–40.

3 Wagner, *Assessment of word reading and reading fluency in English*, 2.

[4] Ibid.

[5] L. M. Sáenz and L. S. Fuchs, "Examining the Reading Difficulty of Secondary Students with Learning Disabilities" in *Remedial & Special Education* 23 (1/2002): 31.

[6] T. M. Hickey, "Fluency in Reading Irish as L1 or L2: Promoting High-frequency Word Recognition in Emergent Readers" *International Journal Of Bilingual Education & Bilingualism* 10 (4/2007): 471–493.

[7], L. Graham, J. Pegg and L. Alder, "Improving the reading achievement of middle-years students with learning difficulties," *Australian Journal Of Language& Literacy* 30 (3/2007): 221–234.

[8] W. J. Therrien and C. Hughes, "Comparison of Repeated Reading and Question Generation on Students' Reading Fluency and Comprehension," *Learning Disabilities - A Contemporary Journal*, 6 (1/2008) 1-16.

[9] T. M, Hickey "Fluency in Reading Irish as L1 or L2", 485.

[10] Ibid., 489.

context, making the difference between denomination and connotation), to translate punctuation into speech (thus reading prosody is very much connected with writing).[1] While reading a text correctly using the suprasegmental elements, the reader has the possibility to self-monitor the reading process, to correct the reading errors and to better retrieve the semantic component in order to facilitate comprehension. This suprasegmental component is part of the bigger concept of accuracy, deeply related with reading fluency. Thus, there are several authors defining reading fluency as reading accuracy and reading speed (number of words/minute).

There are also researchers underlining the fact that there is not a tight relation between prosody and reading comprehension[2] or prosody is considered to be just a mediator between automatic decoding and comprehension;[3] these views underline the need to go on with a deeper analysis regarding reading fluency and its subcomponent. This deeper analysis can be even more necessary when the cultural component regarding language structure and language features is to be considered.

A culturally embedded element for functional reading skills is the phonological/phonetic component, with the segmental divisions: vowels and consonants. Taking into consideration this view, the translation of the written vowels and consonants into oral speech can be greatly influenced by the phonological/phonetic structure of the language, even regarding this segmental aspect. Thus, the conclusion can be drawn that phonetic languages facilitate reading skills acquisition, as well as spelling. However, most of the researchers in the field tend to focus on the causal relation between phonological awareness and reading skills acquisition without going further and differentiating between languages based on phonetic or/and phonological structural criteria division.

Reading fluency is enhanced by the phonetic structure of the language. The conclusion of Bentint's[4] study refers to the fact that alphabetic exposure is a prerequisite for reading development. This alphabetic exposure is not the single element influencing reading acquisition, especially when this alphabetic exposure does not lead to the development of phonological awareness. Snellings, van der Leij, Blok, and de Jong[5] also underline the importance of phonetic decoding by identifying the similarities among phonemes for facilitating reading fluency. They even went further and explained the way the automatic identification of sounds in connection with fast sound-to-sound transitions can improve reading accuracy.

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[1] P.J. Schwanenflugel, A.M. Hamilton, J. M. Wisenbaker, , M. R. Kuhn, , S.A. Stahl, "Becoming a Fluent Reader: Reading Skill and Prosodic Features in the Oral Reading of Young Readers," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 96(1/2004): 119–129. doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.96.1.119

[2] A. Karlin, *"Intonation in oral reading and reading comprehension," Reading Horizons* 25 (1985): 169–175.

[3] Schwanenflugel, "Becoming a Fluent Reader", 119.

[4] S. Bentint "Phonological Awareness, Reading, and Reading Acquisition: A Survey and Appraisal of Current Knowledge" *Haskins Laboratories Status Report on Speech Research* SR-111 / 112 (1992): 167–180.

[5] P. Snellings, A. Van der Leij, H. Blok, and P. F. de Jong "Reading fluency and speech perception speed of beginning readers with persistent reading problems: the perception of initial stop consonants and consonant clusters" *Annals Of Dyslexia* 60 (2/2010): 151–174. Accessed September 25, 2013. doi:10.1007/s11881-010-0039-4

Bose, Colangelo and Buchanan[1] assessed the way phonetic complexity, semantics and fluency as a mixture of factors influence reading acquisition skills. The phonetic complexity of the words was established using the Phonetic Complexity Index, the semantic aspect was divided into semantic blocking paradigm (this referring to words related to a certain semantic paradigm) and semantic unblocking paradigm (this referring to words given at random from a semantic point of view), while fluency was seen in terms of word recognition ability. They underlined that word recognition is very much influenced especially by the combination of complex phonetic structure and semantic blocking paradigms, the reading abilities of children with learning disabilities are very much influenced by this combination of factors (phonetic complexity and semantics). Repetition as an intervention strategy was also a variable of the research taken into consideration by the above mentioned authors, who underlined the fact that the intervention strategies are also dependent on the nature of the linguistic material used. This view is also sustained by many other researchers.[2,3,4]

Speaking about learning disabilities, Therrien and Hughes[5] emphasize the fact that reading comprehension cannot be improved, using as their main strategy the repetition of the words or texts. For reaching efficiency while reading, readers have to be also fluent and accurate. Thus, researchers listed several intervention methods in order to improve reading abilities gaining reading fluency, reading accuracy and reading comprehension.

Graham, Pegg & Alder[6] emphasize that reading abilities and sentence comprehension are deeply related with verbal fluency and automatic words recall. To ensure reading functional skills they propose a new teaching intervention method entitled QuickSmart Reading. This new intervention method is computer assisted; all the lessons are generated on the fallowing format: understanding/vocabulary (5 minutes), automatic recall of focus words (5 minutes), passages-repeated reading (5 minutes), assessment (5 minutes), and reading games (5-10 minutes). QuickSmart focuses on the main elements reunited by the reading skill, these are: fluency, repetition and comprehension.

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[1] A. Bose, A. Colangelo, and L. Buchanan "Effect of phonetic complexity on word reading and repetition in deep dyslexia" *Journal Of Neurolinguistics* 24 (4/2011): 435–444. Accessed September 25, 2013. doi:10.1016/j.jneuroling.2011.01.004

[2] P. Snellings, A. Van der Leij, H. Blok, and P. F. de Jong "Reading fluency and speech perception speed,"151–174.

[3] B. R. Bryant, D. Bryant, D. Boudah, and J. Klingner, "Synthesis of Research Symposium at Cld's 24th International Conference on Learning Disabilities: "MUST READS" FOR 2009*"* in *Learning Disability Quarterly* 33 (2/2010): 133–140.

[4] T. M. Hickey, "Fluency in Reading Irish as L1 or L2*"*, 471.

[5] W. J. Therrien and C. Hughes, "Comparison of Repeated Reading and Question Generation on Students' Reading Fluency and Comprehension," 12.

[6] L. Graham, J. Pegg and L. Alder, "Improving the reading achievement of middle-years students with learning difficulties," 221.

Teodora Cosman, *Ectoplasms*
90cm x 50 cm, acrylic, gouache on tissue, 2013

Eldredge[1] also explored the relations among phonetics, word recognition, speed, fluency and accuracy and also highlighted that phonemic awareness is an extremely important factor contributing to reading skill acquisition, but there are also a number of other factors influencing the acquisition of this skill. Phonetics is very much connected with word recognition, word recognition is tightly connected with fluency and accuracy, fluency and accuracy are important for word comprehension. His main intervention strategy for improving reading abilities focuses on developing phonologic awareness.

Cates and Rhymer[2] underline the importance of timing in reading acquisition and development therapy. They emphasized that explicit timing can positively influence students` reading fluency. They focused on words reading and the established time interval was of three minutes. Time, as an important dimension for reading, has to be deeply explored. There are many researches and programs developed based on the concept of timing and establishing reading rate, reading fluency by counting the number of correctly read words, linguistic chunks or sentences in a certain interval of time. Among these we can mention: Reading Recovery Program (program developed in 1983 by Marie Clay), Great Leaps Reading (developed in 1995 by Kenneth Campbell), Precision Teaching Technique,[3] QuickSmart Reading.

Based on the above listed factors contributing to reading acquisition skills and focusing on fluency and the way it can be assessed, the main objective of this research is to elaborate, and prove the utility of, a reading recovery program for Romanian children with reading difficulties.

The research questions are:

1. Can timing intervention and repetition significantly improve reading in poor reading second grade students?

2. Is the number of correctly read words in a minute lower when reading isolated words than reading a text/story, due to the lack of semantic context?

Research design

Reading Fluency Evaluation and Practicing Task

In order to be able to reach the objective of this research and to answer the established research questions, a specific assessment instrument was elaborated. Reading Fluency Evaluation and Practicing Task (R.F.E.P.T.) is an instrument designed for students with reading difficulties.

The tasks elaborated for this research take into account the following aspects regarding the way reading abilities in general, and reading fluency in particular can be improved. These elements are: language structure (mainly from the phonetic/phonologic

[1] J. Lloyd Eldredge, "Foundations of Fluency: An Exploration" *Reading Psychology* 26 (2/2005): 161–181. Accessed September 25, 2013. doi:10.1080/02702710590930519

[2] Gary L. Cates and Katrina N. Rhymer, "Effects of Explicit Timing on Elementary Students' Oral Reading Rates of Word Phrases," *Reading Improvement* 43 (3/2006): 148–156.

[3] Will Roberts and Norwich Brahm, "Using precision teaching to enhance the word reading skills and academic self-concept of secondary school students: a role for professional educational psychologists," *Educational Psychology In Practice* 26 (3/2010): 279–298. Accessed September 25, 2013. doi:10.1080/02667363.2010.495215.

point of view), the nature of the linguistic material (isolated letters, to syllables, combinations of syllables, words, texts), timing (number or read elements/minute), repetition (reading each list of linguistic materials as many times as needed to increase reading accuracy and reading fluency).

Language structure. Romanian language is a Latin language and the Romanian alphabet includes the 26 English letters plus 5 specific letters. Table 1 presents these specific letters, the phonetic transcription and a short description for the correspondent phonemes.

Table 1 - Specific Romanian letters and phonemes

Specific Romanian letters/phonemes	Phonetic Transcription	Description of the sound
Ă	[ə]	mid-central unbounded vowel
Â	[ɨ]	close central unrounded vowel
Î	[ɨ]	identical to â, see above, used in the beginning and at the end of the words
Ş	[ʃ]	oral, voiceless, alveolar, fricative consonant
Ţ	[ts]	oral, voiceless, dental, sibilant affricate consonant

The Romanian language contains different specific groups of letters/sounds made by the combination of the following letters: “ce”, “ci”, “ge”, “gi”, “che”, “chi”, “ghe”, “ghi”. Children with learning disabilities have difficulties to use and differentiate between these combinations because they do not respect the phonetic correspondence one sound–one letter. Generally, Romanian language is a phonetic language, with some exceptions. The above mentioned combinations are considered to be some of the important exceptions; they require a phonological treatment when reading or writing. The first two bi-phonemic combinations “ce” and “ci” bring into discussion another Romanian phoneme internationally transcribed as “tʃ” (the Romanian phonetic transcription is “č”). The other two combinations “ge’ and “gi” are based on another Romanian phoneme internationally transcribed as “d͡ʒ” (in Romanian its phonetic transcription is "ğ”). Those two phonemes are affricates, post-alveolar, oral sounds, d͡ʒ is voiced and tʃ” is voiceless. When followed by the vowels “e” and “i”, the sound combination “ch” and “gh” are pronounced “k” and “g”.[1]

Another Romanian phonological aspect exploited when elaborating the assessing and training task was the Romanian diphthongs. Their combination of vowels and semi-vowels breaks the phonetic correspondence of one sound to one letter. In Romanian language, diphthongs can be divided into two main categories[2].

[1] Maria Anca and Carolina Hațegan. *Terapia limbajului. O abordare interdisciplinară* (Speech and language therapy. An Interdisciplinary approach). (Cluj-Napoca: University Press, 2008), 51.
[2] Ibid., 140.

- the ascending diphthongs (pronounced by using an ascending pitch), their structure is semi-vowel ("i" or "u")+vowel (all the vowels from Romanian language) (eg. "/ŏa/", "/ĭe/", "/ĭa/", "/ĭu/");
- the descending diphthongs (pronounced by using a descending pitch), their structure is vowel (all the vowels from Romanian language)+semi-vowel ("e", "i", "o", "u") (eg. "/aĭ/", "/eĭ/", "/oĭ/", "/uĭ/", "/əĭ/").

Reading Fluency Evaluation and Practicing Task (R.F.E.P.T.) is an instrument designed for students with reading difficulties. This instrument has 74 pages divided in 5 main parts: letter recognition, syllables, single words, expressions and stories as it is presented in table 2.

Table 2 R.F.E.P.T. description

DOMAIN	**DESCRIPTION**	**Number of items/page**	**NUMBER OF PAGES**
LETTER RECOGNITION	Lower letter and capital letter	60	7 pages
SYLLABLES	consonant-vowel (CV), vowel – consonant (VC), groups of sounds (ce ci ge gi che chi ghe ghi ea , ia, ie, oa, ua, uă), CV, VC, Vsemi-V	60	6 pages
	identical syllables CVCV		1 page
SINGLE WORDS	monosyllabic words and logatoms (CVC)	60	4 pages
	monosyllabic words and logatoms (VCV, VVC)	60	2 pages
	logatoms CVC,VCV	60	3 pages
	rhymes CVCV	60	1 page
	words following the same pattern CVCV	60	10 pages
	monosyllabic words CCVC	60	4 pages
	monosyllabic words CVCV	60	1 page
	words containing diphthongs: ie, ia, ea, oa, ua, uă	60	1 page
	three syllable words (CVCVCV)	60	1 page
	three syllable words (CVCCVCV, CVVCVCV, CCVCVCV)	60	1 page
	2-3 syllable words with „mp" group	60	2 pages
	words containing a combination of the following letters: "ce", "ci", "ge", "gi", "che", "chi", "ghe", "ghi"	60	2 pages

	three syllable words (CVCCVC)	60	1 page
	compound words,	60	1 page
EXPRESSIONS	Two-word chunks	120	8 pages
	Three-word chunks	120	6 pages
	Four-word chunks	120	2 pages

The participants were able to read these tasks on an A4 paper with Times New Roman font and the font size was 18. The teacher recorded the number of words/minute and the errors on a chart.

Participants

The participants in this study were 5 second-grade students. The participants come from a public elementary school in the northwest region of Romania. Participants ranged in age from 7.5 to 8 years. There were 3 female and 2 male participants in this group. All the participants were Caucasians.

All these five participants in the study were assessed by a diagnostic team (psychologist, speech and language therapist, support teacher and social worker). This diagnostic team in Romanian is ensured by a county centre called CJRAE (County Centre for Resources and Education Assistance). All our counties have this type of resources and educational assistance centres that are supposed to assess all the children with low school results in the beginning of the new school year. The second graders are specially assessed in the beginning of the school year for establishing if they face disabilities or they are just children with poor results in reading, writing or mathematics. Thus, after being diagnosed, the second graders with learning difficulties are ensured, through the institution of the support teacher, the possibility to benefit from therapeutic programs within the public educational system. If it is necessary they can also attend speech and language therapeutic programs. It is important to mention the fact that this team is the only one entitled to make the learning disabilities diagnosis in Romania, the assessment and diagnosis procedure being nationally implemented (this means that the speech and language therapist from the public schools cannot establish the learning disabilities diagnosis).

Thus, all the five participants in this study were diagnosed with learning disabilities in the beginning of the second grade. The participants' educational performance (these children are perfect candidates for having failed in the subject of Romanian language, as they all have great difficulties in acquiring reading and writing) also sustains the results of the assessment procedure through which they were diagnosed as having learning disabilities.

In order to be able to better control the psycho-pedagogical implications of the new elaborated instrument, the participants in the research were selected to be in early stages of the therapeutic approach, this meaning that they had just very recently been diagnosed as having learning disabilities when they were selected to be part of this study.

Procedure

First phase – The reading evaluation task took place in the speech therapy room, on a daily schedule, for one week. The therapists made sure that all the participants recognized all the capital letters and all the lower case letters and different syllables (this lets the researcher establish that children can co-articulate sounds, they have surpassed the sound/letter reading phase). Second phase – The experimental version of the Reading Fluency Evaluation and Practicing Task was continued for 3 weeks. The speech therapist explained to the participants to read as fast as they can the words on the page and when they would finish reading the words on a page, they had to start reading again from the beginning of the page. The command to start reading was "Start" and the command to finish reading was "Stop". The speech therapist used a timer to monitor the time it took the students to complete the reading task. The students read single words for a minute, expressions for a minute and stories for another minute. The researcher recorded in a graph the number of words the student read and the numbers of errors the student made for each page (single words, expressions and stories). At the end of each session, the therapist showed the performance to the students and tried to encourage them to have a better score the next day. When the participants finished reading each task, the teacher asked each student to reread the words he/she missed or he/she made an error reading and asked the student to repeat the correct word, the correct chunks of words or the correct sentence in the story. When the student had less than 2 errors per page, he/she could go on to the next page.

Results

Students` reading abilities were assessed both before and after the intervention trying to underline the utility of the elaborated task and of the implemented intervention procedure. In order to answer the first research question about timing and repetition and their implication on reading fluency students` results were illustrated in Fig. 1/6. Thus, Fig. 1 presents the number of words/minute the students read before the evaluation and the number of errors recorded for the two syllables words list (CVCV).

As it is presented in Fig. 1, all the participants improved the number of correct words read in a minute. The best performance was recorded by H.A. who started reading 42 words/minute and at the end of intervention he was able to read 75 words/minute, this represents an increase in reading words of 78%. The number of errors recorded in the first evaluation decreased for all the participants in the last evaluation.

Four out of five participants improved their reading fluency while reading a list of words containing different groups of letters as it is presented in Fig. 2. D.B improved his reading fluency from 60 words/minute to 85 words/minute; this represents an increase in word reading of 70%. The number of errors recorded by the same participant decreased from 8 recorded during the first evaluation, to 0 errors recorded during the last evaluation.

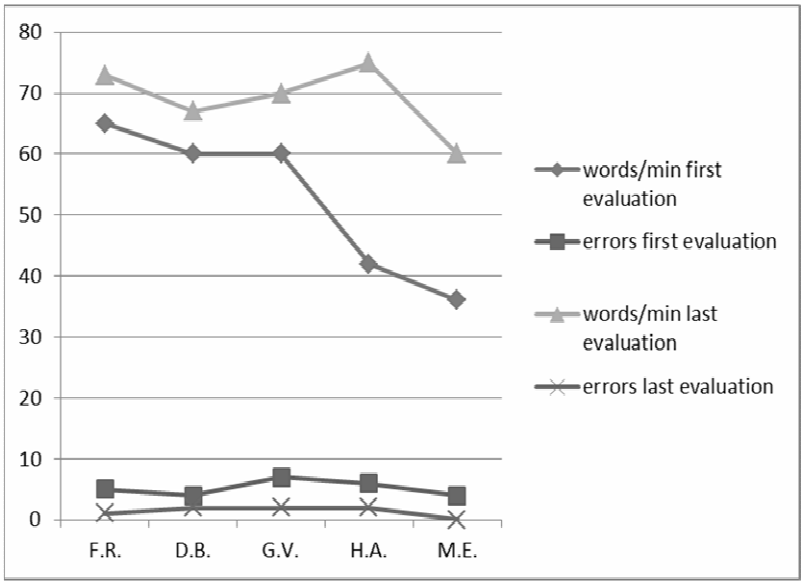

Figure 1. The number of words/min and the number of errors in reading before intervention and after intervention for the two syllables words list (CVCV).

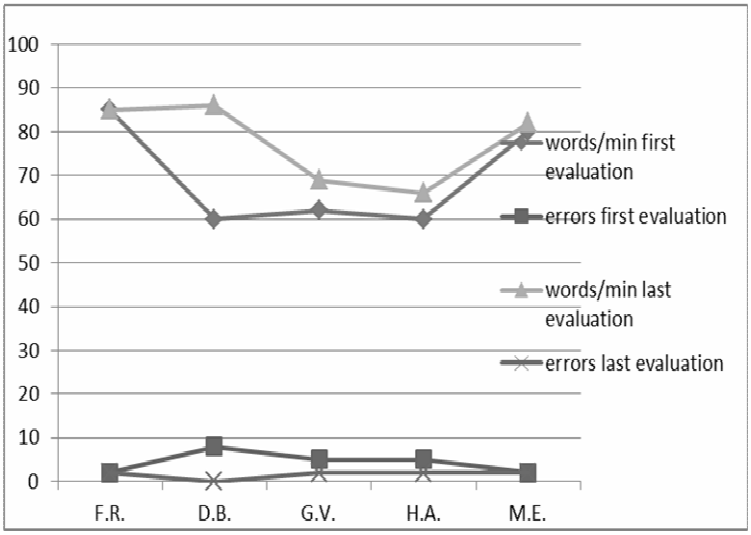

Figure 2. The number of words/min and the number of errors in reading before intervention and after intervention for the list of words containing different groups of letters

All the participants improved their reading fluency in reading chunks with 2-6 words/minute (Fig. 3)

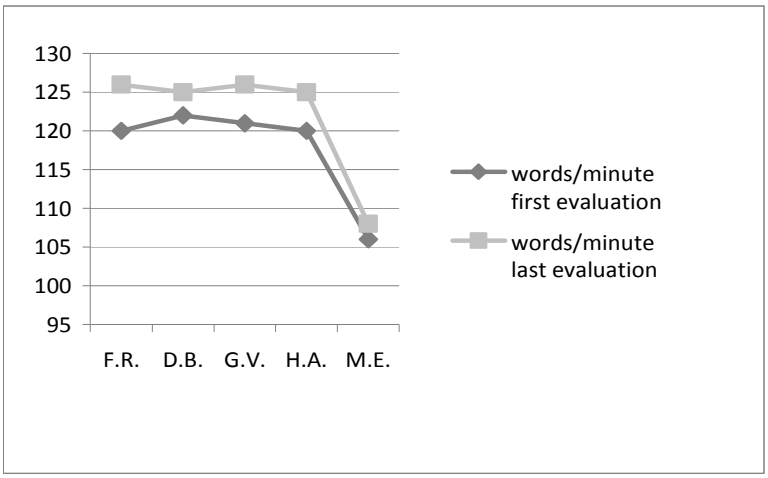

Figure 3. Words/minute in chunks reading before and after the intervention

The number of errors in reading chunks decreased in 4 cases according to the results illustrated in Fig. 4

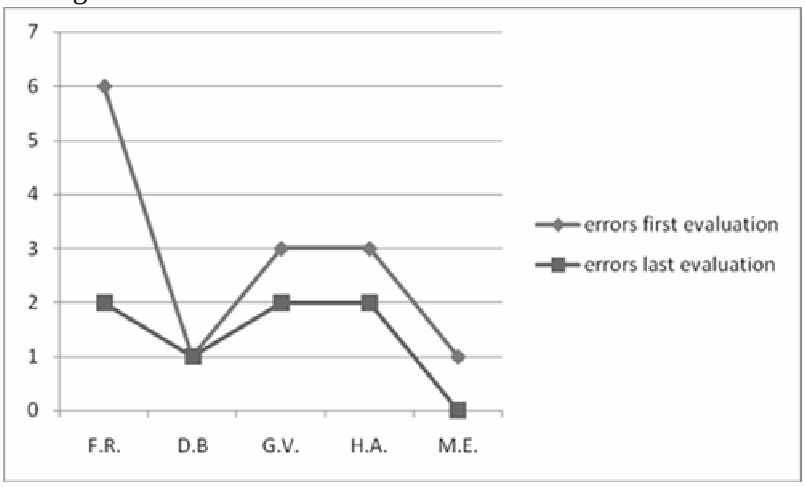

Figure 4. Errors in chunks reading before and after the intervention

Four participants improved their fluency in reading a text by 2-6 words/minute and one participant recorded the same results in the first evaluation and the final evaluation, as it is presented in Fig. 5

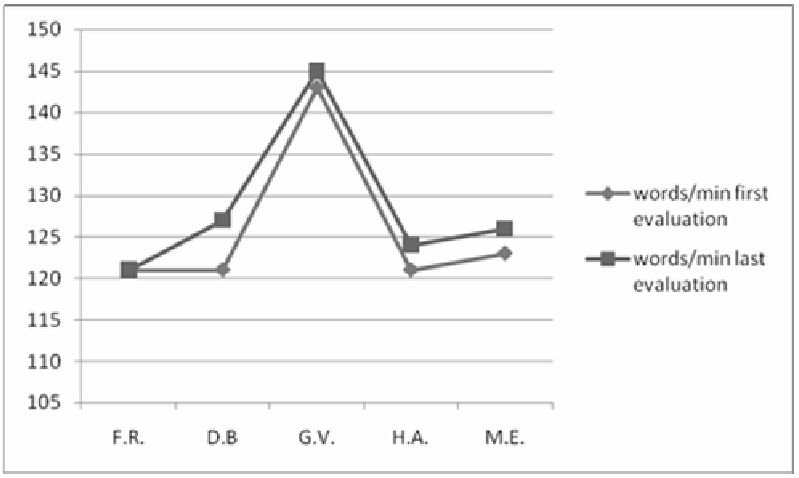

Figure 5. Words/min in texts before and after the intervention

The number of errors in reading a text decreased in four cases, the highest improvement was recorded by F.R. who recorded 4 errors in the first evaluation and 1 error during the last evaluation (Fig. 6)

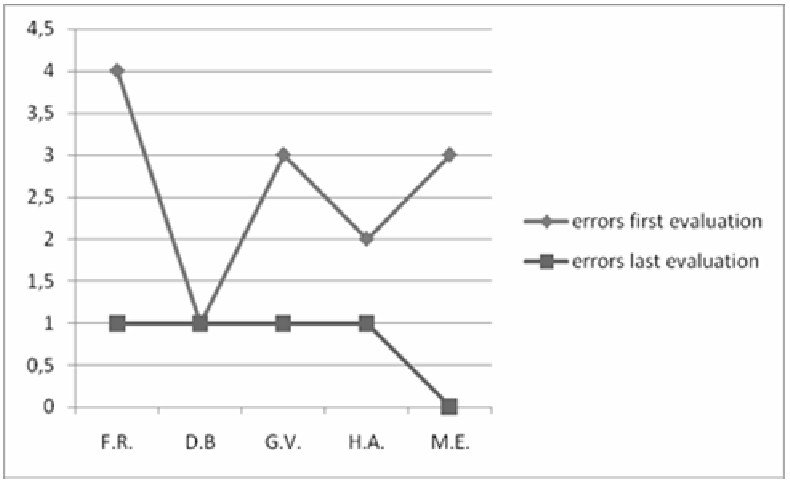

Figure 6. Errors in texts before and after the intervention

In order to answer the second research question, the one regarding the way semantic context influences reading fluency (number of words/minute), students` results were illustrated in Figs. 7-11.

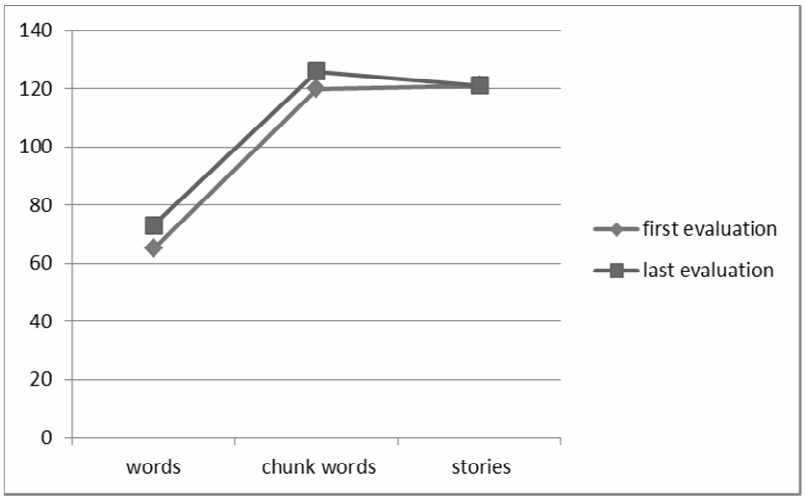

Figure 7. F.R. first evaluation and last evaluation reading words, chunks and stories

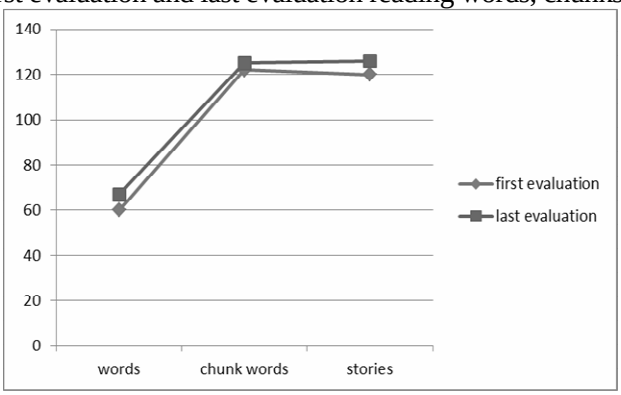

Figure 8. D.B. first evaluation and last evaluation reading words, chunks and stories

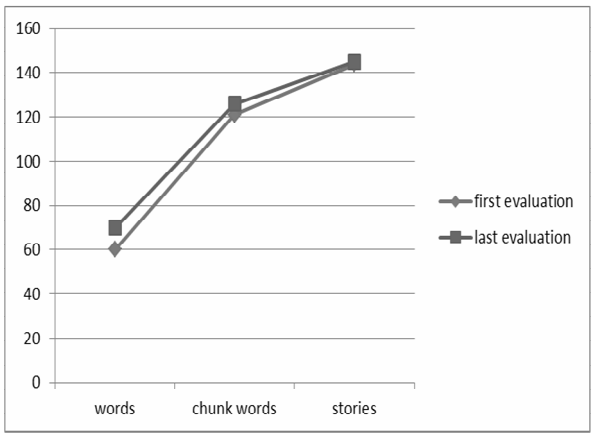

Figure 9. G.V. first evaluation and last evaluation reading words, chunks and stories

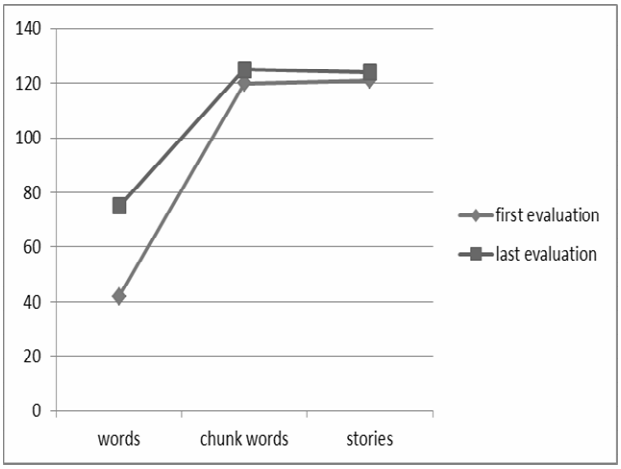

Figure10. H.A. first evaluation and last evaluation reading words, chunks and stories

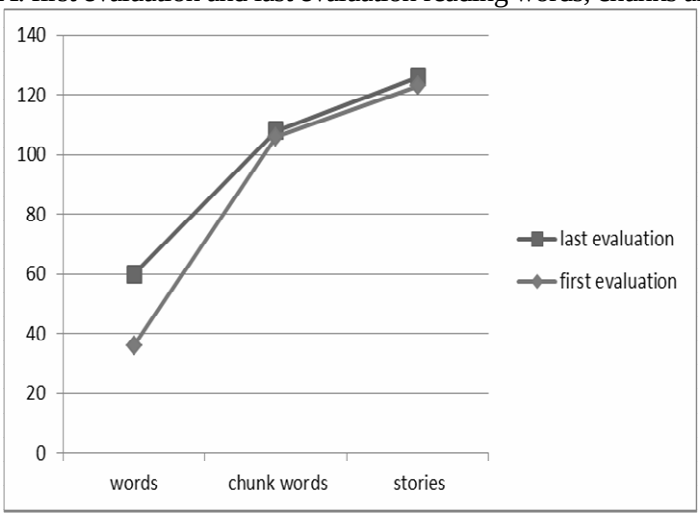

Figure11. M.E. first evaluation and last evaluation reading words, chunks and stories

The obtained data, both in the pre-test phase and in the post-test phase proves us the fact that the semantic context influences to an important degree the reading fluency in the case of the children with reading difficulties. Thus, the lower number of read words/minute were obtained by all the participants in the research when reading isolated words, while the most numerous read words/minute were obtained when reading texts, stories. The data from Fig. 7-11 also illustrates the fact that the number of read words/minute increases to a high degree when the child is supposed to read chunks comparatively with the situation when the child is supposed to read just isolated words. For instance, M.E. reads during the last evaluation phase just 60 isolated words/minute, while the number of the chunks almost doubles (108 words/minute) and the number of the words/minute in stories is 126.

Discussion

This is a pilot study for this new instrument. The number of the participants in the research is a small one, this does not allow to drawn general conclusions and to make evidence-based statements about the way reading fluency can be improved in the case of second grade students with language related learning disabilities. The short period of time for intervention is also another important aspect that needs to be reconsidered when developing a more extended research focusing on improving reading fluency in second grade children with language related learning disabilities.

Going beyond the methodological restraints, the obtained results underlines the fact that timing and repetition are key elements for improving reading fluency. Even if children had the possibility to read the lists of linguistic material for just three weeks they obtained improved results in evaluation after the intervention period in comparison with the results obtained in their first evaluation.

Regarding the importance of the semantic context and the way it can influence reading fluency, the results demonstrate that research question number two is correct but it needs to be tested on larger and representative population in order to be able to generalize the obtained results. A possible explanation of the fact that the obtained results underlined that semantic context can influence reading fluency to a great degree is to be found in the theories regarding the low decoding abilities of children with learning disabilities.[1, 2] They tend to use the semantic context in order to be able to facilitate words retrieval and automatic word recognition. Perfetti[3] also underlined the fact that an important element for reading fluency is automatic word recognition, facilitated in a semantic context. Starting from this, an important therapeutic strategy can be formulated; this strategy needs to be focused on enhancing phonological awareness and decoding abilities.

Conclusions

This research focused on elaborating a new instrument in order to improve reading fluency in language related reading difficulties. Two research questions were established based on the newest theories and approaches concerning reading fluency. The main challenge was to take into account the Romanian language structure and to best illustrate, within the framework of the instrument, Romanian phonological and semantic particularities. The obtained results underlined that the research design is a valuable one opening new research perspectives in this field. R.F.E.P.T. proved to be an efficient instrument to be used in improving reading fluency for this group of students with learning disabilities. Based on the findings of this pilot study, the elaborated instrument can be enriched, thus new lists with pseudo-words, with complex grammatical words (compound words and derivative words), with triphthongs within words are recommended to be elaborated, as well as new texts containing complex words.

[1] S. Bentint, "Phonological Awareness, Reading, and Reading Acquisition," 167–180.

[2] A. Bose, A Colangelo and L. Buchanan, "Effect of phonetic complexity on word reading and repetition in deep dyslexia," 435–444.

[3] C.A. Perfetti, "The representation problem in reading acquisition," 145.