

# The Impact of Using Enhanced Teaching Materials on Core Skills When Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Maria Ana Cumpăt<sup>1</sup> and Nicoleta Zouri<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Dimitrie A. Sturzda School, Iași, Romania*

<sup>2</sup>*Centennial College, Toronto, Canada*

E-mail: ana\_cumpat@yahoo.com; E-mail: nzouri@centennialcollege.ca

---

## Please cite this paper as:

Cumpat, M.A. and Zouri, N., 2023. The Impact of Using Enhanced Teaching Materials on Core Skills When Teaching English as a Foreign Language. In: R. Pamfilie, V. Dinu, C. Vasiliu, D. Pleșea, L. Tăchiciu eds. 2023. 9<sup>th</sup> BASIQ International Conference on New Trends in Sustainable Business and Consumption. Constanța, Romania, 8-10 June 2023. Bucharest: ASE, pp. 31-37

DOI: [10.24818/BASIQ/2023/09/004](https://doi.org/10.24818/BASIQ/2023/09/004)

---

## Abstract

Our study evaluated the effectiveness of several types of study materials used in addition to the textbook in teaching English as a second language to middle school-level students in Iasi, Romania. The additional classroom materials used were a combination of workbooks used for the students to practice their writing and reading skills and online video materials to practice their listening and comprehension skills. The same materials contributed to the English vocabulary enrichment of the students. The study participants were students from grades 5, 6, and 7 at Dimitrie A. Sturzda School from Iasi, Romania. The study showed that the additional study materials were effective at improving the reading, writing, and listening skills of students in grades 6 and 7 while decreasing the skill levels of students in grades 5. The study did not take into consideration other factors that may contribute to a decrease in skill levels for students in grade 5.

## Keywords

Teaching effectiveness, English as a second language education, enhanced classroom material effectiveness, middle school English skills.

DOI: [10.24818/BASIQ/2023/09/004](https://doi.org/10.24818/BASIQ/2023/09/004)

---

## Introduction

In his work, Tomlinson says classroom materials are anything that is used to facilitate the acquisition of a language. They may vary from „textbooks, cassettes, videos, CD-ROMs, dictionaries, grammar books, readers, workbooks or photocopied exercises” (Tomlinson, 2011). Merriam-Webster defines the „textbook” as „a book used in the study of a subject such as one containing a presentation of the principles of a subject or as a literary work relevant to the study of a subject” (Webster, 2023).

In Romanian schools, the primary source for students in learning and developing their knowledge is the textbook. Nunan says that „a textbook is the main component of any instructional program and it is difficult to imagine a class without it” while Cunningsworth adds that textbooks are an effective resource for both teachers and students for self-directed learning with various activities (Cunningsworth, 1995; Nunan, 1999). Sheldon claims that textbooks “represent the visible heart of any ELT program” (Sheldon, 1988).

In the last few years, an effort has been made by the authors of the English textbooks to create additional teaching material to enhance the learning experience of students and improve their English core skills.

In this study, we have compared the use of textbooks only with the use of textbooks combined with supplementary language-enhancing material in teaching English as a foreign language to middle school students in grades 5, 6, and 7.

## 1. Literature Review

### *Listening Skills*

In Brown's opinion listening is at the center of the learning process, being at the same time the least understood and researched skill in language learning and it is often ignored by most language instructors. (Brown, 2008). At the same time, Floyed defines this skill as a process involving hearing, attending to, comprehending, analyzing, and reacting to spoken messages (Floyed, 1985). Regarding the nature of the communication, this changes as the context vary. Wolvin and Coakley talk about five different types of listening: discriminative listening, comprehensive listening, critical listening, therapeutic listening, and appreciative listening. This diversity of listening demonstrates that this skill is an active process and not a passive product (Wolvin, 1988).

To emphasize the importance of listening and its impact on the other core skills, Rost talks about the need to expose the learner to different types of oral interaction because the spoken language, within the context of normal conversations, could represent a challenge. He also points to how the learners' grammar improves through listening (Rost, 1994). This idea of the importance of listening appears in Harmer's book too which says that listening plays an important role in understanding a language, which it can be done with the help of the teacher, textbooks, and supplementary materials so that the learner can hear differences between varieties and accents of English (Harmer, 1998).

A language is learned by observing its pronunciation, intonation, usage, or structures or the spoken language. Exposure to appropriate listening can also teach how the emotions of the speaker can be reflected by the vocal aspects (Rangaraju, 2020). In learning a language Grant insists on hearing particular sounds, (Grant, 1987) while Ur talks about real-life situations, such as interviews, radio news, lecture, story-telling, and others (Ur, 1991). Moreover, when choosing a type of listening task or material, different kinds of activities such as comprehension questions or extracting specific information in a meaningful context should be taken into consideration (Cunningsworth, 1995).

### *Speaking Skills*

Speaking is considered a critical skill in learning a language by learners and its success is measured in terms of accomplishment in oral communication (Nunan, 1999).

In their book, Carter and Nunan, agree that speaking skill is the most difficult skill because the participants in a conversation cannot always be prepared, and the communication has a less predictable specificity. The ability to speak a language means functioning in that language. When we talk about knowing a language, we merely talk about speaking it (Nunan, 1999).

Textbooks can provide several real-life contexts suitable for conversation practice. Paired work; group work and even monologues or presentations can be used as a way to work on this skill. (Rangaraju, 2020). But as Grant appreciates, textbooks do not contain enough activities for speaking, and most of it is done by the teacher and not by the learner. This might be a reason why some learners find it difficult to express themselves orally (Grant, 1987). The fluency, accuracy, appropriateness, grammar, relevant length, responding or initiating or discourse markers are an integral part of the development of this skill as Lackman states in his book (Lackman, 2010).

### *Reading Skills*

Reading skills are the most accessible for practice with textbooks. Different themes, most of them adapted to the current interests of the learner and according to their level through short stories, comics, picture reading, or news articles (Rangaraju, 2020). Reading texts from the textbooks 'main purpose is to improve this skill, presenting grammar structures, developing vocabulary, and discovering a new topic or a model for writing (Cunningsworth, 1995).

In developing cultural awareness and sensitivity, according to Tomlinson, materials should help the learner (Tomlinson, 2003). The extracts provided in textbooks, which are carriers of cultural information, are usually based on specific cultures which create interest to the learner. The combination of both local and global culture suggests a balance in introducing and developing the learner's cultural awareness (Starkey, 1991; Cortazzi, 1999).

### *Writing Skills*

Level, age, or interests are among the main factors for choosing the appropriate type of writing. By writing a simple poem, postcards, or more complex types, the learner can produce a written piece at the level of their language knowledge (Harmer, 1998).

Writing tasks are meant to give adequate practice to the learner. Starting from small parts of sentences to various writing compositions, the approach should be more on the teaching of this skill rather on its result, the text itself (Rangaraju, 2020). The variety of tasks followed by the given emphasis on accuracy, style, punctuation, spelling, layout, and the review of the written work should be present in this section (Cunningsworth, 1995).

Because of this, practice is required to perfect in the creation of a letter, a message, an invitation, a short paragraph, an application, or descriptive or narrative writing (Rangaraju, 2020).

### ***Grammar***

As Ur (1991) states, “Grammar is sometimes defined as the way words are put together to make correct sentences.” making it one of the most important parts of a language, essential in understanding and producing words and phrases.

In his work, Cunningsworth affirms that grammar can be thought of without its meaning (Cunningsworth, 1995). At the same time, Ur mentions that “it is not good knowing how to perceive or construct new tense of a verb if you do not know exactly what difference it makes to meaning when it is used” (Ur, 1991), an idea that reinforces that learning a language it is more than studying its grammar rules.

As Tomlinson adds, learning materials have to help the learner to connect the learning experience to their own life, and the textbooks should include clear instructions alongside some tips and tricks for learning and teaching grammar (Tomlinson, 2003). However, some additional materials, such as songs, games, handouts, or quizzes can be very effective in learning grammar rules (Rangaraju, 2020).

### ***Vocabulary***

Strongly related to grammar, spelling, and pronunciation is vocabulary which deals with learning and teaching single words idioms, phrases, and others (Ur, 1991). Cunningsworth says that in the process of learning a new language, we should expect to learn about 1000 new words for every 120 to 140 hours that we spend learning that language. Learning outside the classroom can be facilitated by a variety of vocabulary-learning tasks provided by the students’ workbooks. However, it is difficult to include the whole English language vocabulary in a single course book, because of its dimension (Cunningsworth, 1995).

On the other hand, presenting and teaching new vocabulary can be made by a clear description of the concept, the description of its characteristics through examples and images, uses, synonyms, or antonyms (Ur, 1991).

Another approach can be the association of the lexis with some particular situations such as clothing, food, animals, greetings, and so on (Cunningsworth, 1995) that can be found under the same section “working with language” of each unit, where are various vocabulary tasks (Rangaraju, 2020). Maděřičová claims the importance of the lexis presentation through its distinction between passive, active, or classroom vocabulary (Maděřičová, 2013). But, the limited number of vocabulary exercises is not enough for the learner’s development who is forced to use auxiliary materials to expand their knowledge (Rangaraju, 2020).

## **2. Research Methodology**

The research is focused on comparing the core English skills levels of students before the introduction of the enhanced teaching materials with the skills levels after 6 weeks of using enhanced teaching materials during the class instructional time. The core English skills are reading, writing, and listening.

The research focuses on using the following textbooks as main teaching resources:

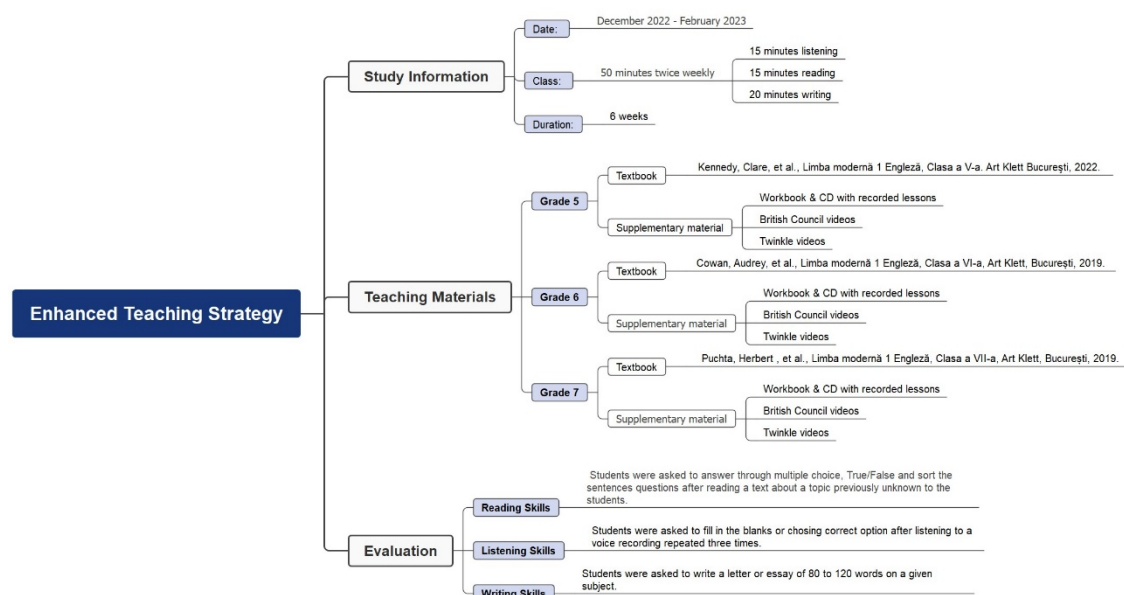
- For grade 5: Kennedy, Clare, et al., *Limba modernă 1 Engleză, Clasa a V-a*. Art Klett București, 2022.
- For grade 6: Cowan, Audrey, et al., *Limba modernă 1 Engleză, Clasa a VI-a*, Art Klett, București, 2019.
- For grade 7: Puchta, Herbert, et al., *Limba modernă 1 Engleză, Clasa a VII-a*, Art Klett, București, 2019.

The following enhanced supplementary teaching resources were used:

- Kennedy, Clare, et al., Limba modernă 1 Limba engleză Caietul elevului, Clasa a V-a Workbook, Art Klett, București, 2022. Accompanied by CD with recorded voice lessons.
- Cowan, Audrey, et al., Limba modernă 1 Limba engleză Caietul elevului, Clasa a VI-a Workbook, Art Klett, București, 2020. Accompanied by CD with recorded voice lessons.
- Puchta, Herbert, et al. Limba modernă 1 Limba engleză Caietul elevului, Clasa a VII-a Workbook, Art Klett, București, 2020. Accompanied by CD with recorded voice lessons.
- Perju, Iulia, Writing Skills for young learners Workbook, Booklet, București, 2006.
- British Council Teen, learning English language British Council websitesheets, videos, recordings for the productive skills (writing and speaking) and the receptive skills (reading and listening)
- Twinkle, an online platform with worksheets for multiple school subjects adapted to the national and international curriculum, from which we used grammar and vocabulary worksheetsfor English language.

The enhanced supplementary teaching resources were used to allow the students to practice their reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills through various exercises complementary to the lessons in the textbook.

The lessons were conducted with two 50 minutes sessions per week for each grade. Each session was structured as follows: 15 minutes of listening, 15 minutes of reading, and 20 minutes of writing.



**Figure no. 1. Teaching strategy with supplementary materials**

The students were evaluated 6 weeks after the introduction of the supplementary material, not including vacation time.

The 50 minutes test had the following structure:

- Reading section: learners were asked to read a text related to the specific subject they were taught which was previously unknown to them. Then, they were asked to answer multiple-choice, True or False, match the two columns, and sort the sentences type of question. The section evaluated the student’s comprehension.
- Listening section: learners were asked to listen to a short recording from their books or from the online platforms used for training. The recording was repeated three times. Then they were asked to fill in the blanks or choose the correct option from the list.
- Writing section: learners were asked to write a letter or an essay of around 80 to 120 words, on a given subject. For the letter, students had to write a response to a letter from the textbook. For the essay, the students had to write their opinion on a specific subject that was previously presented in the Reading section.

The grades were on a scale of 0 to 10 with zero being the least prepared and 10 for the best prepared.

The participants of this study were 76 students from „Dimitrie A. Sturdza” School from Iasi, Romania, from grades 5, 6, and 7. Of those 76 students, 39 were females, and 37 were males.

There were 28 students from grade 5, 16 females, and 12 males, 27 students from grade 6, 13 females and 14 males, and 21 students from grade 7, 10 females and 11 males.

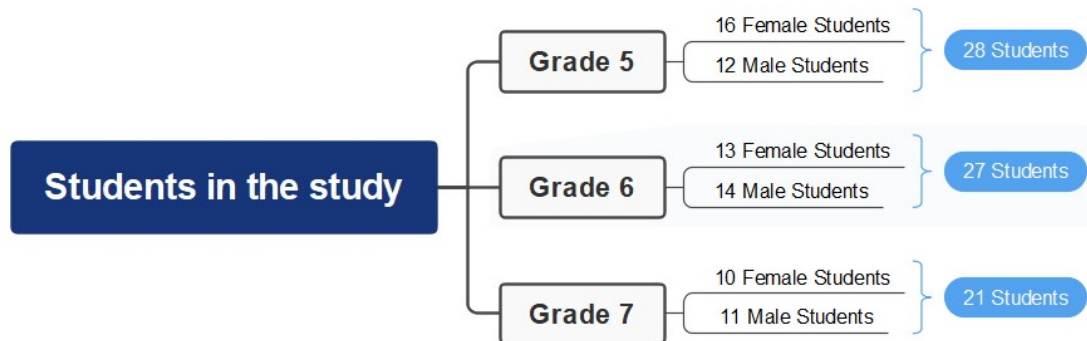


Figure no. 2. Study participants

### 3. Research Results

The results for grade 5 students show a significant decline in performance for writing and listening skills by 36.58% and respectively by 44.79% for female students and 30.65% and respectively 8.21% for male students. A smaller decline has been observed in reading skills with 4.77% for female students. Male students’ reading skills have improved by 5.36%. The rate of change for reading, writing, and listening skills for grade 5 students is shown in Figure no. 3.

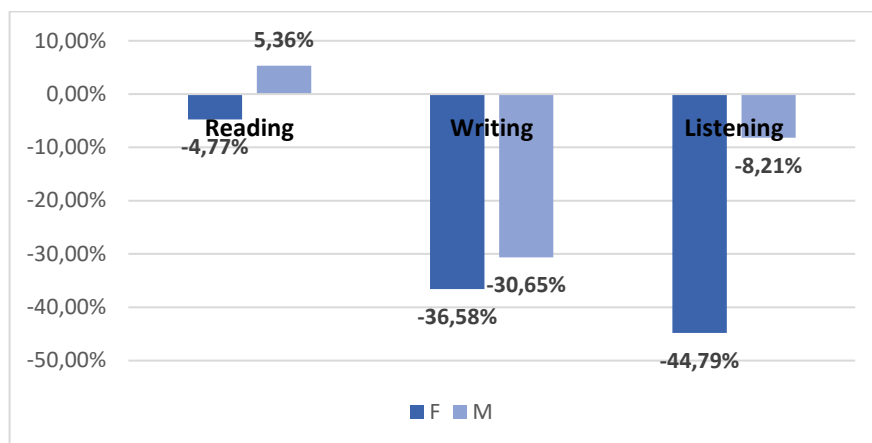


Figure no. 3. Grade 5 students’ skills rate of change

For grade 6 the rate of grade change was positive for males for reading, writing, and listening. The reading skills have improved by 24.74% for females and by 5.01% for males. Females’ writing skills have declined by 4.37% while males’ improved by 10.87%. Listening had the most significant improvement for all students, with 37.01% and 18.58%. The rate of change for reading, writing, and listening skills for grade 6 students is shown in Figure no. 4.

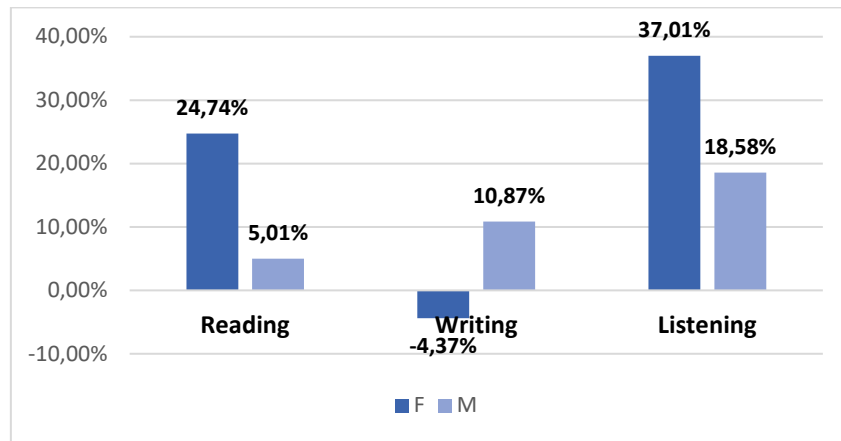


Figure no. 4. Grade 6 students' skills rate of change

For grade 7 student results show an improvement both in reading and listening, 14.85% and 11.42% for females and 20.17 and 24.06% for males. A small decline can be seen in writing, 2.83% for males and 0.13% for females. The rate of change for reading, writing, and listening skills for grade 7 students is shown in Figure no. 5.

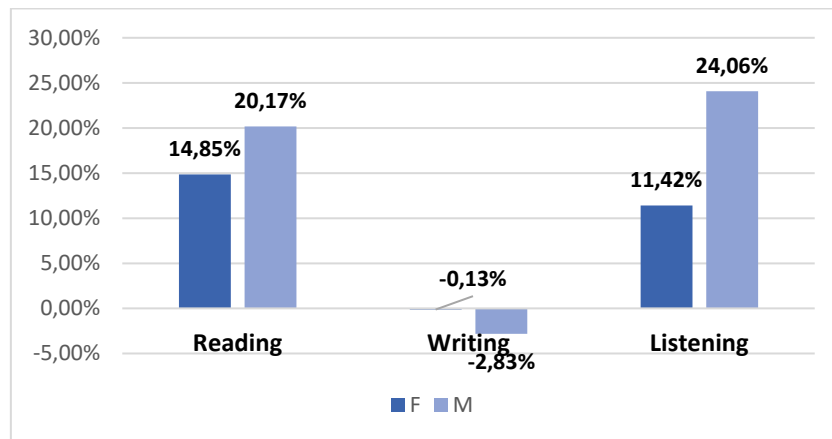


Figure no. 5. Grade 7 student's skills rate of change

Overall, the rate of grade change was positive for both male and female students for reading and listening and was negative for writing skills. Female students have improved their reading by 11.61% and listening by 1.21%, while their writing skills have declined by 13.69%. Male students have improved their reading by 10.18% and listening by 11.48% while their writing skills have declined by 7.54%.

Table no. 1. Overall grade change rates per sex

Sex	Reading	Writing	Listening
F	11.61%	-13.69%	1.21%
M	10.18%	-7.54%	11.48%

Per class, students in grade 5 results have declined by 17.71% for reading, 33.61% for writing, and 26.50% for listening, students in grade 6 results have improved by 14.88% for reading, 3.25% for writing, and 27.79% for listening, and students in grade 7 results have improved by 17.51% for reading and 17.74% for listening, and have declined by 1.48% for writing.

Table no. 2. Overall grade change rates per class

Class	Reading	Writing	Listening
5	-17.71%	-33.61%	-26.50%
6	14.88%	3.25%	27.79%
7	17.51%	-1.48%	17.74%

## Conclusions

The enhanced supplementary material use has contributed to a significant improvement in reading and listening skills for male and female students in grades 6 and 7, while for students in grade 5, the same skills level has declined with exception of boys' reading skills which have improved slightly.

Writing skills have declined significantly for both sexes for grade 5 students, while for grade 6 female students and grade 7 both male and female students, performance has declined slightly. The only group whose writing skills improved were boys from grade 6.

Future work will include the student's perspective on the learning materials and a greater emphasis will be placed on using the specific type of learning materials the students enjoy using more. Also, a potential collaboration with a trained child psychologist will be considered to identify factors that could have contributed to the considerable decline in skills for grade 5 students.

## References

- British Council, 2022. *Online English Tutoring* [online] Available at: <<https://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/>> [Accessed 12 January 2023].
- Brown, G., 2008. Selective listening. *System*, [online] 36(1), pp.10–21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2007.11.002>.
- Cortazzi, M. and Jin, L.X., 1999. *Cultural mirrors: Materials and methods in the EFL classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cunningsworth, A., 1995. *Choosing your Textbook*. London: MacMillanmann.
- Floyed, J., 1985. *Listening a practical approach*. Glenview, Illinois: Scott Foresman and Company.
- Grant, N., 1987. *Making the Most of Your Textbook*. Essex, England: Longman Group UK Limited.
- Harmer, J., 1998. *How to Teach English*. London: Longman.
- Lackman, K., 2010. *Teaching speaking sub-skills: Activities for improving speaking*. [pdf] Available at: <[http://www.kenlackman.com/files/speakingsubskillshandout13poland\\_2\\_.pdf](http://www.kenlackman.com/files/speakingsubskillshandout13poland_2_.pdf)> [Accessed 12 January 2016].
- Maděričová, I., 2013. *The proportion of language skills in English textbooks at lower secondary schools* (Doctoral dissertation, Masarykova univerzita, Pedagogická fakulta).
- Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2023. *Definition of TEXTBOOK*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/textbook>> [Accessed 23 February 2023].
- Nunan, D., 1999. *Second Language Teaching & Learning*. Heinle&Heinle Publishers, 7625 Empire Dr., Florence, KY 41042-2978.
- Nunan, D., 2004. *Task-Based Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rangaraju, S., 2020. A Critical Evaluation of Various English Books. *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research*, 9(3), pp.3977-3980.
- Ridge, E., 2008. R Carter and D Nunan (Eds). 2001. The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. *Cambridge University Press*. 294 pp. Per Linguam, [online] 17(1). <https://doi.org/10.5785/17-1-135>.
- Rost, M., 1994. *Introducing listening*. London: Penguin Group.
- Sheldon, L. E., 1988. Evaluating ELT textbooks and materials. *ELT Journal*, 42(4), pp.237-246.
- Starkey, H., 1991. Converging Approaches in Textbook Writing. *Mediating languages and cultures: Towards an intercultural theory of foreign language education*, 60, p.209.
- Tomlinson, B., 2003. *Developing Materials for Language Teaching*. London and New York: Continuum.
- Tomlinson, L., 2011 *Materials development in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Twinkl, 2023. *English Language Resources*, [online] Available at: <<https://www.twinkl.ro/>> [Accessed 10 January 2023].
- Ur, P., 1991. *A course in language teaching: Practice and theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wolvin, A., 1988. *Listening*. Dubuque, Iowa: Brown.