ADAPTIVE INFORMATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF REMOTE METHODOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR TEACHING RFL IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE ENVIRONMENT: STRUCTURE AND CONTENT

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Abstract

The article presents an effective tool that can provide continuous methodological support for foreign teachers of Russian as a foreign language (RFL) based on the analysis of methodological priority areas. In our opinion, these areas can include as follows: optimisation of the advanced training system for teachers-philologists, assistance in developing modern models and means of teaching Russian based on the RFL teaching methods and taking into account the specifics of a national educational environment. In the structure of the adaptive informational and educational environment of remote methodological support for teaching RFL in a foreign language environment, we have identified the following units: diagnostic (determining the starting level of student's communicative speech competence/RFL teacher's professional pedagogical competence); projective-adaptational (developing students' individual educational trajectories); educational (ensuring students' effective advancement along their individual trajectories in order to fill the gaps in their knowledge, skills and abilities revealed during diagnostics); resulting (containing data on the results of initial and final diagnostics, current and intermediate control); consultative-methodological (involving interaction between those who provide support and those who receive support); and interactive (represented by informational platforms for organising communication between students). Separately, technological, informational-methodological and resource units were identified, which are important for meeting the educational needs of both categories of subjects of teaching RFL in a foreign language environment. The specifics of implementing this scheme was analysed as applied to support for foreign teachers of RFL. Thus, according to the results of diagnostics, an individual educational trajectory is formed (the projective-adaptational unit). Then a training programme (the educational unit) and test materials (the control unit) are developed. The consultative-methodological unit provides interaction with students in both "static" and interactive formats. The resulting unit contains information about the results of starting, final and current checks of the students' skills/abilities development dynamics. The interactive unit is designed for informal communication between tutors and students. Considering the data presented, it seems possible to create a special platform with the purpose to implement a remote methodological platform.

Keywords: adaptive informational and educational environment of remote methodological support, foreign language environment, priority areas of methodological support

1 INTRODUCTION

Globalisation, internationalisation and active migration processes have led to the fact that currently tens of millions of the world's inhabitants consider Russian to be their native or second native language. When outside the Russian Federation, modern teachers of the Russian language quite often need methodological support for the system of teaching Russian in a foreign language environment. In this regard, an effective

tool will be, in our opinion, continuous intercultural professional interaction of Russian and foreign professional communities of teachers-philologists and organisers of the pedagogical process aimed at providing conditions for effective teaching Russian in a foreign educational environment as well as for professional development, self-development and self-actualisation of foreign teachers of Russian.

2 PRIORITY AREAS OF METHODOLOGICAL SUPPORT

We believe that the priority areas of methodological support should include first of all *assistance to foreign teachers-philologists in their professional becoming and development*. As our analysis showed, currently, this work is being actively carried out in the countries of Eastern Europe. However, in Western European countries, not all teachers of the Russian language have the opportunity to improve their professional skills. Thus, access to this system is significantly difficult for teachers of Russian who work not in Russian but in national educational organisations (especially commercial ones). Limited opportunities in the field of advanced training are among the major problems for teachers-philologists in Germany, where the professional training of teachers of the Russian language and literature is often limited to basic university education (Report on research conducted …, 2017).

It should also be noted that it is impossible to solve this problem today by simply increasing the number of measures to improve the skills of foreign Russianists. It is necessary to review the content and structure of this system, its "ideology and philosophy" (The concept of state support and promotion…2015). It is important to look for new, modern principles and mechanisms for improving the skills of foreign teachers of Russian.

Currently, there are a large number of courses and advanced training programmes that are held in different formats: face-to-face, online or with the involvement of blended learning techniques. However, these courses do not always provide a qualitative "increase" in the professional competence of foreign Russianists. Full-time advanced training courses gather together large groups of teachers with different levels of professional training. A group is offered a unified training programme, which does not take into account whether each teacher will be able to understand and assimilate the information offered, whether he (or she) has enough knowledge, skills and abilities for this.

To effectively use the richest methodological resource that has been developed in the field of additional professional education of teachers-philologists, we need a different, modern mechanism. It is important to determine the real individual needs of foreign teachers of Russian that arise at a particular stage of their professional development. In this regard, it seems advisable to organise *qualified assistance to teachers in compiling individual educational (more widely – career-educational) routes: strategies for advanced training and, in general, their professional growth.* It is necessary to provide teachers with the opportunity to implement these individual routes. Russianists should be broadly informed about courses and advanced training programmes so that they could choose precisely those which will provide them with effective assistance. An organised system of scientific, educational and methodological tutorship and consulting will help to design individual educational routes, select forms and means of their implementation: at the level of relations between a Russian scientific or educational organisation and a foreign organisation that provides Russian language classes or through individual tutorial support.

We also consider it important *to create a certification system for foreign teachers of Russian* which would be recognised in the professional community, governmental and administrative bodies as well as in educational institutions of the countries where teachers work. Currently, for example, teachers of Russian in Slovakia pass the first certification after 8 years of work at school and the second certification after 10. Certification is carried out by the State Pedagogical Research Institute and local methodological centers. In some other countries teachers-philologists pass similar certification procedures. However, at present, there is no Russian certification system for foreign teaching staff with recognised documents and clear qualification requirements. At present, foreign teachers of Russian have the opportunity to receive only a Russian certificate of professional development or professional retraining. Introducing a Russian system of certification procedures would contribute to determining real levels of teachers' professional training, identifying needs and problems arising in the process of their pedagogical becoming, development and self-development.

Our analysis allowed us to establish another important area in the methodological support for teaching the Russian language abroad. The analytical reviews and reports that we studied indicate that many foreign educational organisations (primarily commercial ones) use ineffective strategies and methods for teaching Russian. We believe that such educational organisations need targeted scientific and methodological assistance from the Russian pedagogical community in designing linguistic educational courses and

programmes, taking into account the specifics of a national educational environment, the motives and interests of students. In our view, it is also advisable to involve new methods for organising the system of teaching the Russian language abroad. The principle of territorial distribution of this system seems to have great potential. The representative office of the Russian Federation can act as an initiator of teaching Russian in various educational organisations in the host country: in Russian language centres at universities, Sunday schools, weekend clubs, etc.

Thus, the priority areas of methodological support for teaching Russian language abroad are the optimisation of the system of advanced training of teachers-philologists, assistance in developing modern models and means of teaching Russian based on the RFL teaching methods, taking into account the specifics of a national educational environment. Summarising the above, it should be noted that the effectiveness of scientific and methodological support largely depends on the quality of analytical and monitoring studies of the Russian language teaching system in a foreign educational environment.

Thus, the existing system of support for teaching the Russian language abroad reveals a whole range of problem areas demanding attention of the scientific and educational community in Russia. We believe that the development of a scientifically based, experimentally proven model of methodological support integrating modern technologies, mechanisms, methods and means of comprehensive assistance to foreign teachers of the Russian language will contribute to the effective solution of these problems.

3 ANALYSIS OF THE ADAPTIVE INFORMATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF REMOTE METHODOLOGICAL SUPPORT

To solve some of the above problems and implement effective remote methodological support, it is necessary to create a special adaptive informational and educational environment, the specifics of which will be in individualised, differentiated and personalised methodological assistance – this will be achieved through the design of flexible, adaptive individual educational trajectories and continuous methodological assistance at all stages of implementing these trajectories.

We defined methodological support for teaching RFL in a foreign language environment as cross-cultural interaction, the purpose and essence of which is to provide methodological assistance to the main subjects of the educational process – foreign students and teachers – in fulfilling their needs for learning and teaching, respectively. The specifics of support lies in individualisation, differentiation and personal orientation of methodological assistance, which is achieved through the design of flexible, adaptive individual educational trajectories and continuous methodological assistance at all stages of implementing these trajectories. Support for both students and teachers is provided in accordance with these principles and features, by a single algorithm; the differences exist only in the content of these activities, which is determined according to the types of educational needs of those who receive support.

In the structure of the adaptive informational and educational environment of remote methodological support for teaching RFL in a foreign language environment, we have identified the following units:

- Diagnostic;
- Adaptational;
- Educational (including educational and control components);
- Resulting;
- Consulting-methodological;
- And interactive.

Separately, technological, informational-methodological and resource units were identified, which are important for meeting the educational needs of both categories of subjects of teaching RFL in a foreign language environment.

Let us briefly consider the specifics of each unit. The functional purpose of the *diagnostic unit* is to determine the starting level of student's communicative speech competence/RFL teacher's professional and pedagogical competence. Student's competence is diagnosed by means of tests developed in the format of TORFL – this system has been in use for many years and has proved its validity and reliability. Diagnostics of teacher's competence is carried out with the help of special tools, i.e. diagnostic charts (certification matrices) developed on the basis of the subject matter specialist's competence model. The adaptive informational and educational environment makes it possible to organise this stage in automatic, manual or

mixed formats.

Automatic diagnostics is carried out using such technologies as network tests, web cases (the optimal "genre" when conducting teacher diagnostics – methodological situational (problem) tasks). Teletesting (network testing) is one of the most effective and convenient ways of starting and final testing of students' knowledge, skills and abilities. This is due to its characteristics such as interactivity, possibility of choosing a test algorithm (which is fully consistent with the objectives and essence of remote methodological support), adequate reflection of the subject matter model in the testing process, integrability into various educational technologies, profilisation, scalability, accessibility, etc. Network testing can be carried out both in a synchronous (online) and asynchronous format.

As already noted, various options for starting diagnostics are possible: a) automatic, i.e. computer diagnostics; b) "manual", which is carried out by a consulting tutor or network teacher; c) mixed (complex): for example, students pass computer testing and receive additional control tasks by e-mail, Skype, etc. from a network educator, methodologist or consulting tutor. At the same time, in the adaptive informational environment of remote methodological support, it is possible not only to provide test results to a testee but also to place them on the administrative panel, which can be accessed by a consulting tutor or network teacher.

To ensure the objectivity of the network testing results, the server must contain an extensive database of test tasks in order to randomly form an updated test version for users during each new test. There are various forms of test storage: dynamic (Java, CGI scripts, etc.) and static (HTML code). Methodologists (N.V. Lomovtseva and others) apply the following requirements to the organisation of test control in a network format: objectivity (the subjective influence should be minimised, which is rather difficult due to testees' remote access), democratism (the complexity of tests for starting and final diagnostics should be approximately the same to ensure equal rights and opportunities for testees), cost-effectiveness (the maximum number of testees should be tested for the minimum time), etc.

Nowadays, "mobile" learning technologies (m-learning) are actively being developed. A number of projects aimed at their promotion have been implemented in Europe, for example: "From E-learning to M-Learning" within the Leonardo da Vinci programme (2003); "M-Learning for Youth", etc. A special Mobile Learning Management System (mLMS) has been developed for managing mobile learning (learning using mobile communications). This also promotes mobile testing, i.e. sending test materials to users' mobile devices (smartphones, laptops, etc.), which significantly saves time (and location) for diagnostics.

As noted above, good results in starting and final diagnostics of teachers' competence are also provided by the use of network case technology. Web cases, in addition to the diagnostic function, perform training and developmental functions in the adaptive informational environment of RMS, since they contribute to improving the skills of self-learning and self-education, research and, in general, creative qualities of an RFL teacher's personality [Steinberg, 2009]. The potential of web cases in the informational environment of RMS is due to the "consonance" of the goals and content of this technology with the tasks of remote methodological support for teachers [Britskaya, 2016]. In web cases, teachers are faced with situations reflecting typical professional difficulties. This method of testing is as close as possible to the conditions of their work and therefore makes it possible to accurately determine which their skills and abilities are not formed at a sufficient level. As already mentioned, it is advisable to diagnose students' communicative speech competence using tests of the TORFL system.

The *projective-adaptational unit* to the fullest extent reflects both the essential specificity of RMS and the qualitative uniqueness of the informational environment in which it is implemented. The functional purpose of this unit is to form students' individual educational trajectories. This function can be performed by a network teacher, consultant tutor or methodologist but the use of adaptive remote technology provides much more advantages. In the informational environment of RMS, it is also possible to use a complex version of designing a teacher's individual educational trajectory: its automatic design with subsequent correction by a network teacher (tutor, methodologist). Individual educational trajectories in remote methodological support are necessarily adjusted to the trainees' needs. In this regard, it is important to (a) promptly inform students about the results of the initial diagnosis and discuss these results with them; and (b) provide them free access to educational resources of the environment so that they can choose (add, adjust) the trajectories offered by the system or a network teacher: supplement them with those massive open online courses (MOOC), their individual modules or auxiliary resources that best meet their needs.

The *educational unit* includes training and control components. The functional purpose of the training component is to ensure students' effective advancement along their individual trajectories in order to fill the

gaps in their knowledge, skills and abilities revealed during diagnostics. The resource content of this component includes massive open online courses, video-trainings, webinars, open web lectures, etc.

The most effective form of remote education for both students and teachers is a massive open online course. Its advantages include:

- The possibility of ensuring the educational process interactivity in remote education by the use of innovative organisational forms (webinars, web-based consultations, etc.) as well as specialised structural components (Internet communication platforms, etc.);

- The optimality of its structural organisation: it includes all the components necessary to organise education: training, control, communication, etc.;

- The multi-format: a MOOC can involve educational materials in the traditional "printed form" (in PDF and WORD formats), presentations, multi-format (audio, video and other) educational materials, etc.;

- The openness of the MOOC structure, which makes it possible, if necessary, to supplement it with new components;

- The flexibility of its structure, which makes it possible (1) to model it with a focus on the level of students' communicative competence and (2) to exclude from the educational process redundant materials or those that do not correspond to the students' needs, interests, and national characteristics;

- The possibility of ranking, which, on the one hand, motivates students, on the other hand, allows the network teacher to identify the lowest-performing students in order to provide them additional advice, training and other support;

- The multi-level organisation of modern MOOCs, due to which it is possible to provide a methodological and conceptual unity for students advancing from Level A1 (A0) and higher; and

- The hypertext organisation, the ability to be integrated with other electronic/network resources for educational purposes and involve additional training materials (by specifying relevant links to informational platforms, etc.).

A MOOC has a modular structure: its division into components provides for considerable flexibility of individual educational trajectories, making it possible in the process of their design not to include any MOOC completely but to select its modules that are relevant for a trainee.

A webinar (web conference, online seminar) as an interactive form of remote training provides an opportunity not only to quickly convey relevant information to teachers but also to ensure its effective learning, since in the process of communicating with students, lecturers (moderators) can identify issues that require additional clarifications, examples, illustrations, etc. This form of work creates a sense of "constant involvement in the process" and active participation in the organisation of training. Web-lectures, online consultations (individual and group), etc. are also effective forms of education in the informational environment of RMS.

In the course of training on individual trajectories, monitoring is performed over the students' skills/abilities development dynamics as well as the quality of their learning. The *control unit* is provided with the tools for carrying out teletesting, network cases, network design activities, and adaptive network testing. Adaptive network testing is carried out with the help of tests with "variable structure", which is ensured by "the possibility of adapting test materials to the characteristics of testees, i.e. selection of test tasks, their number, rate and sequence of presentation to the level of their proficiency"[Chelyshkova, 2002].

Researchers [Malushko, 2017; Dolshikova, 2018; Kurilenko, 2018;] distinguish the following types of network test adaptation: (a) depending on the number of correct answers of the testee, the proportion of easy, medium and difficult tasks is regulated, i.e. an adaptive translation mechanism is used between the difficulty levels of tasks; (b) the proportions of various topics of the training programme presented in tests are changed; and (c) higher scores are given for performing more complex tasks, etc.

As we have already noted, it seems promising to use web case technologies that perform not only controlling but also developing and training functions. The informational environment of RMS involves various sets of textual, multimedia materials (cases), e.g. compilation tasks, project tasks, creative product tasks, analytical tasks, judgment tasks, scientific tasks, solutions of controversial problems (consensus building tasks), etc.

The consultative-methodological unit. Methodological support is based on the principles of dialogue, cooperation, priority of supported person's goals and the needs. Therefore, its important area is the

interaction between those who provide support and those who receive support at all stages of implementing RMS. Consulting tutors and network teachers are in contact with students in the process of diagnostics, developing individual educational trajectories, during training, etc. The most effective remote technologies for organising "feedback" are e-mail, Skype telephony, popular instant messengers, social networks, etc. For this purpose, blogs are also used that perform the following functions: informing, consulting, instructing (latent management of the addressee's actions, including educational ones), stimulating the teacher's mental activity as a partner in blog communication, etc. This unit can also be provided in the adaptive informational environment with "static resources", e.g. learning instructions, memos, etc., posted on relevant informational platforms.

The *resulting unit* contains data on the results of starting and final diagnostics, current and intermediate control. For this purpose, an electronic portfolio is used. The electronic portfolio is a tool for "system or prolonged" testing, when, based on a comparison of the results achieved at different stages of training, students can independently assess the dynamics and quality of the growth of their knowledge, skills and abilities. The electronic portfolio records the results of starting and final diagnostics as well as the current control during training in massive open online courses. The portfolio also includes the results of the project and other practical tasks that students have completed. The advantages of this technology (Bragina, 2011; Polat, 2014; Kocheturova,2014; Rebrina, 2017; Biryukova, 2018) include the availability and ease of implementation, the possibility of systematic, regular self-monitoring of educational achievements, integrated and "aspect" self-assessment, the focus of all materials on assessing the achievement of the final result of RMS.

The *interactive unit* in this sector of the adaptive informational environment is represented by informational platforms for organising communication between students of mass open online courses, methodological and communicative online tandems for sharing experience, communicating in Russian (which in this environment is important both for students and for teachers: as we noted above, a large percentage of foreign teachers are not proficient enough in Russian). This unit can also be used to organise network communities of Russian and foreign teachers of RFL, which will contribute to the consolidation of the international community of teachers-philologists.

We shall now consider the specifics of implementing this structure in relation to meeting the educational needs of various categories of subjects.

Let us analyse the specifics of applying this scheme to support foreign teachers of RFL.

Remote methodological support for foreign teachers of RFL. For this category, it is advisable to carry out diagnostics of two types: using tests developed according to the TORFL system (Level C1) and using diagnostic charts for key competencies relevant to this level. Our research has shown that, with a general decline in the level of training philologists in national universities, theoretical disciplines were the first to suffer; therefore, it is advisable to include in diagnostics tasks for testing knowledge in the field of pedagogy, psychology, etc.

Projective-adaptational unit. According to the results of diagnostics, an individual educational trajectory is formed. If a trainee's communicative competence level is not sufficiently formed, the trajectory will include two sections: the trainee will be recommended to receive training (a) as part of an online course or a massive open online course on RFL (the level will depend on the diagnostic results) (b) according to the programmes of such disciplines as pedagogy, psychology, the fundamentals of RFL teaching methodology. The trajectory is coordinated with the trainee.

The *training component* of the educational unit includes a training programme, which may contain not only MOOCs but also their individual modules, depending on the identified gaps in trainees' knowledge, skills and abilities. The basic part of the programme (MOOCs and their modules) is complemented by webinars and open web lectures. Trainees are also provided with additional materials: scientific periodicals on the issues of the courses, collections of links to reference books, dictionaries, electronic encyclopaedias, etc. Materials are provided in both text and PDF formats (so that trainees can print them out and study the most complex issues in more detail) and in a network format.

The *control unit* includes test materials, design tasks, cases necessary for monitoring the students' skills/abilities development dynamics. Control can be carried out by a teacher who leads the MOOC and a consulting tutor.

The *consultative-methodological unit* provides interaction with students in both "static" and interactive formats. The first is represented by memos, instructions, requirements for tasks for independent work, etc.

Other types of tests and control tasks can also be presented here so that students could independently practice doing them. The second is communication between consulting tutors and students via e-mail, Skype telephony, popular instant messengers, social networks, etc.

The *resulting unit* contains information about the results of starting, final and current checks of the students' skills/abilities development dynamics. As noted above, the most effective technology is the electronic portfolio.

The *interactive unit* is designed for informal communication between tutors and students. In this unit, it is possible to place e-mail addresses of course participants (with their consent) to exchange interesting materials or discuss issues related to the course programmes.

4 CONCLUSION

Thus, in order to comprehensively and effectively support foreign teachers of RFL, an adaptive informational and educational environment was created for remote methodological support in a foreign language environment. Its structure and content were also considered. This environment includes the following components: diagnostic;

- Projective-adaptational;
- Educational (including educational and control components);
- Resulting;
- Consulting-methodological;
- And interactive.

Considering the data presented, it seems possible to create a special platform, the purpose of which will be to implement a remote methodological platform.

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