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ORGANIZATION OF THE DIGITAL EDUCATIONAL SPACE FOR FOREIGNERS OF THE PRE-UNIVERSITY LEVEL

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Abstract

The article discusses topical problems of creating a unified information environment for foreign students of pre-university training programs. The authors of the study analyze the experience of teaching foreign students at Pskov State University in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years. The subject of close attention was the conditions influencing the motivation of learning Russian as a foreign language, adaptation of foreign phones to new realities and the effectiveness of their learning in a digital context. The study also took into account such parameters as current and final learning outcomes, satisfaction of foreign students with the learning process, assessment of the educational process and its results by all its participants. Various methods were used to collect and process the data: the questionnaire method, the descriptive-analytical method, including observation, comparison and generalization of data. The authors formulated the problematic issues of the study, in which they identified the most relevant aspects of distance learning under the pre-university training program for foreign citizens: features of the organization of contact work with foreigners, specificity of the formation of communication skills, concentration of time space, self-identification of participants in the educational process and their sociocultural adaptation. The findings made it possible to develop recommendations for organizing a comfortable digital educational environment that would take into account the forms of collective interaction with all participants in the educational process, different ways of motivating people to learn and work on the formation of socio-cultural competence in the absence of a full-fledged linguistic environment.

Keywords: Digital educational environment, online training, pre-university training of foreign citizens, Russian as a foreign language

1. Introduction

The attitude towards digital technologies in various sciences, including in the methodology of teaching Russian as a foreign language, has changed rapidly. For a long time, specialists talked about the need to introduce information technologies into the educational process, analyzed ways and means of solving these problems. In methodological science, technical means have traditionally been considered as one of the most effective teaching aids. Thus, the authors of the New Dictionary of Methodological Terms emphasize that technical teaching aids are used in the pedagogical process and self-education to "transfer and store educational information, control the course of its assimilation, form and consolidate knowledge, skills, and abilities" (Azimov & Shchukin, 2009, p. 313). The digital revolution, which has embraced the last decade in almost all spheres of human life, has made it possible to rethink the place and role of digital technologies. Today, experts see in them not only tools, effective teaching aids, but also what forms the educational process, determines the identity of its participants – a digital educational environment. The digital environment, in turn, is determined by the interactive communicative activity of a person, and if in traditional learning conditions, communication is a necessary condition for teaching a second language, then in the digital world, communication, in addition to this, becomes also a form of existence of this environment, the only possible way for the participants in the educational process to exist. In other words, using digital tools, the teacher and students independently create all the components of the educational process, including modeling the space-time continuum of the lesson (being simultaneously in different time and space points, the students and the teacher are united by virtual time and space of the lesson). All this allows one to talk about completely new forms of communication between participants in the educational process, therefore, the most urgent task of methodological science is to study the influence of these forms both on teaching a second language and on the ways of mastering it.

Modern science is at the stage of comprehending the ongoing processes. Thus, researchers pay close attention to the psychological aspects of online learning (Klimenskikh et al., 2019; Murphy & Stewart, 2017; Su & Waugh, 2018), study the influence of the digital environment on the self-identification of students' personality (Eom, 2019; Silva et al., 2021; Wolfe, 2021). Methodologists analyze the teacher's attitude to new forms of interaction, readiness for communication in a digital context (Gorbenko et al., 2020; Honig & Salmon, 2021; Muljana & Luo, 2019). A large number of studies are devoted to the study of various tools, teaching aids that allow one to work effectively in a digital environment (Anderson, 2018; Azimov, 2020; Belsky, 2019; Vyazovskaya et al., 2020). Experts are also trying to find the best methods and techniques for working in new conditions (Bettinger & Loeb, 2017; Murphy, 2021; Picciano, 2017), assess the effectiveness of the formation of speech skills in different types of speech activity (Pourdana et al., 2021; Vitorovich, 2021; Zhang & Vesnina, 2020), to find out how the sociocultural aspect of teaching Russian as a foreign language can be taken into account in digital reality (Umbetbekova & Zhakipova, 2020).

2. Problem Statement

During the pandemic, Russian universities faced the need to assess in practice all the risks and benefits of learning in a digital environment. Teaching Russian as a foreign language under these conditions continues even now due to the limited entry into the Russian Federation of students from a number of countries, therefore philologists-Russianists actively continue to master the pedagogical tools of the new educational environment. At the same time, the attitude to the new reality is gradually changing: if earlier teachers perceived it as a temporary and forced fact, now they saw in this new opportunities for organizing interaction with students. This paper analyzes these forms on the example of the implementation of the educational program of pre-university training for foreign citizens at the Pskov State University. As one knows, the purpose of such a program is to prepare foreign citizens to study in Russian at a Russian university, therefore, the basis of pre-university education is precisely language training, as well as the adaptation of foreign students to a new socio-cultural environment. The digital transformation of the educational process leads to the need to rethink the content of training, methods and techniques, teaching aids, the relationship of participants, etc., while leaving unchanged the goals and objectives of teaching pre-university training.

3. Research Questions

The work considers the following problematic issues:

3.1. What forms of distance interaction are the most optimal in teaching Russian as a foreign language at the stage of pre-university training?

3.2. What factors make it possible to form a unified digital educational environment?

3.3. How can distance education of foreign students be organized, while maintaining time indicators of achieving the level of proficiency in Russian as a foreign language?

3.4. How, in the absence of a language environment, to maintain a high level of motivation of students and ensure effective work on socio-cultural adaptation?

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study was to develop recommendations for organizing a comfortable digital educational environment for students in pre-university training programs for foreign citizens. Such an educational environment should take into account the forms of collective interaction with participants in the educational process, different ways of motivating people to learn and work on the formation of socio-cultural competence.

5. Research Methods

The methodology of this research was the civilizational and cultural approaches, the logical method (theoretical), the study of the experience of educational organizations and personal pedagogical experience at the university (empirical) were used. The study involved 148 foreign students studying at the Pskov State University under the pre-university training program. We analyzed the learning

experience of the program in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years and examined the conditions that affect the effectiveness of learning in a digital context. The study took into account such parameters as current and final learning outcomes, satisfaction of foreign students with the learning process, assessment of the educational process and its results by all its participants. All teachers of the program were also involved in the survey.

6. Findings

The analysis showed that both teachers and foreign students in the digital environment prefer the forms of contact work: online lesson, online seminar, online consultation (based on the Zoom platform). This is due to the fact that the priority for students in teacher training programs is direct linguistic contact with teachers and other participants in the educational process. Thus, out of 148 surveyed students, 139 (94%) answered that it is more convenient for them to learn Russian in an online lesson. 4 (2.7%) listeners answered that they would prefer a remote work format (watching a video lecture explaining new material and completing assignments on their own). 5 (3.3%) students chose the option, which offers a combination of two training formats (online lessons and distance work). In our opinion, these preferences, on the one hand, indicate that the students themselves realize how much they need motivation in learning Russian, which is easier to maintain in conditions of contact with the teacher. On the other hand, these survey results show that students understand the specifics of organizing a foreign language lesson, in which the bulk of learning is related to the formation of speech skills. As one knows, the formation of these skills is determined by the principle of oral advance: first, the formation of skills and abilities orally, in the conditions of educational communication, then the consolidation of these skills in written forms of communication. In this regard, in teaching a second language, the online format is the most preferable.

An analysis of the experience of interaction between teachers and students in the online environment also showed the specific features of an online lesson in comparison with a lesson in the classroom. Firstly, all teachers note the expansion of the possibilities for using visualization: demonstration of a presentation, an electronic board (electronic clipboard), joint viewing of videos, images, color possibilities, text highlighting, insertion of symbols, animations, etc. Secondly, this format provides ample opportunities for using interactive forms of work: creating online questionnaires, mental maps, organizing role-playing games, etc. Thirdly, this leads to a revision of the content of the lesson: in an online lesson – oral forms of communication, independent distance work – written forms of communication.

Many teachers of the pre-university training program noted the concentration of the time space of the online lesson, which, according to the observation of the methodologists, has an activating effect on the cognitive processes of students: they shift to a more active mode of activity. The following format of work showed the greatest efficiency: traditional academic 2 hours (1 hour 30 minutes) is 1 hour of contact work (online) + 30 minutes of distance independent work with subsequent supervision by the teacher. It is this model of interaction that made it possible to maintain the necessary pace in mastering Russian as a foreign language.

In addition, the effectiveness of the educational process depends on the convenience of the chosen Internet service. For example, during the training of foreign students at the Pskov State University in pre-university training programs, the Google Classroom platform was used. The resource made it possible to optimize remote communication with foreigners: the teachers had the opportunity to work with their group of students, send them teaching materials and check homework. Students' independent work was also organized on the basis of Google Classroom: links to online simulators for practicing pronunciation skills, links to online tests, and dictionaries were posted here. In addition, each teacher uploaded a recording of an online lesson held in Zoom, which helped to reduce the risks associated with missing classes for an objective reason: different time zones, Internet speed, etc. 137 (92.5%) of 148 listeners noted the convenience of working with the Google Classroom platform in combination with online lessons in Zoom.

Self-identification of participants in the educational process is also becoming an important indicator of the effectiveness of the digital educational environment. The teacher pays attention to any manifestation of the student's activity. This can be creating their own account, using a photo in a video conference or an included video camera, regularly posting completed work in Google Classroom, communication in group messengers between a group and a teacher, between students of a study group, contacting a teacher for individual consultations – all this creates an objective image of a student and has a positive effect on their motivation.

A lesson in the videoconference format is limited in time, and independent remote work does not imply constant pedagogical support. Communication in messengers, on the other hand, allows students to maintain constant communication in the "learner – teacher" and "learner – learner" formats. Such communication is semi-formal in nature, which creates an atmosphere for easy, relatively spontaneous communication, as much as possible in a written language. The need to urgently solve all sorts of issues and the possibility of quick communication in messengers or social networks allow students to get rid of the language barrier and get language practice within the framework of Internet communication. In the digital environment, the problem of the socio-cultural adaptation of foreign students is becoming even more urgent.

In the digital environment, the problem of the socio-cultural adaptation of foreign students is becoming even more urgent. The teacher must decide how to ensure acquaintance with Russian culture and the Russian language environment if the student is at home, outside the Russian Federation. And it is the resources of the digital environment that make it possible to bring a foreigner closer to the country of the target language. This is not only watching movies, but also organizing virtual excursions to museums and sights of Russia, virtual walks around the city, elements of project activities. Such types of work, according to students, allow them to feel the "effect of presence" in the language environment, to reduce the distance between the student's place of residence and the university. Another way of introducing foreigners to the Russian language environment is polycode text, which is widely used in Internet communication (using emoticons, memes, etc.).

7. Conclusion

The study made it possible to develop the following recommendations for organizing effective interaction in conditions of distance work with foreign students studying under the pre-university training program:

- in order to consistently form and improve speech skills and abilities, it is necessary to find a balance between the contact form of work with students (online lesson, online consultation) and other forms of remote non-contact work;

- in order to maintain the required level of motivation of students, the teacher must be ready to include various tools based on modern information technologies in the educational process; the unity of such an information educational environment should be supported by a digital platform that meets the goals and objectives of learning;

- in order to optimize the educational process, it is recommended to use the following work format: traditional academic 2 hours (1 hour 30 minutes) is 1 hour of contact work (online) + 30 minutes of distance independent work with subsequent supervision by the teacher;

- in order to create a comfortable environment based on the personal interaction of participants in the educational process, it is recommended to use all possible communication channels, various forms of digital activities. educational space that would create all conditions for student self-identification;

- in order to recreate the missing language environment, it is necessary to develop methods and techniques for the socio-cultural adaptation of students through the capabilities of the digital information system.

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