THE IMPACT OF GLOBAL TRENDS ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN RUSSIA

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Abstract

The following research analyses the effects of global socioeconomic trends on the market of foreign language teaching in Russia. The focus is placed on how the demand is increasing for specific languages (Chinese, Arabic) as a result of the impulsive industrial development of these countries and regions, together with the appearance of a new segment of consumers (the elderly), caused by the increasing average of human lifespan and the strengthening of the «Silver Economy».

In the field of foreign language teaching the author includes commercial services, offered by private schools, language courses, private tutors and also secondary and higher educational institutions. The latter is not only subjected to great state control, but also to the influence of global trends.

In the first part of the research significant global trends are stated, along with analysis of the changes produced by them on the market of foreign language teaching. In addition, the already mentioned «Silver Economy», which is now developing in Russia, can register trends like lifelong learning and the maintenance of mental health of elderly people. As a result, more adults are learning foreign languages not for studying or working abroad, but just for personal growth and pleasure. Moreover, it is not possible to ignore the phenomenon of general digitalization, which includes several programmes, apps and internet platforms, having a great impact on the whole teaching market. Gaming is of great significance, in this case it is used as a synonym of edutainment, together with an interdisciplinary approach to education.

In the second part of the research, the author draws some conclusions about the future development of this field of study and provides solutions, which may coincide with the consumers’ demands. A change in the demand system requires also a change in the market commercial offer. For example, new products have already appeared on the market, however, this is more like an exception to the rule.

In the context of the political and economic crisis of Russian companies, as well as in foreign language teaching, quick responses, flexibility and innovative decisions are needed.

The aim of this research is, particularly, to find an interesting solution for the long established problem in this field of study.

Keywords: global trends, foreign language teaching, Silver Economy, lifelong learning, digitalization, marketing research.

1 INTRODUCTION

The pace of the society development continues to accelerate having an impact on many processes occurring in society, including the field of foreign language teaching. The demand is obviously changing, and it is necessary to analyze the fluctuation and to keep up with it. In the crisis in Russia, it is also a matter of survival for many private and public language schools.

2 METHODOLOGY

The research is based on the works of reputable scientists, both foreign (D. Perani, S. Alladi, R. Dobbs ecc.), and domestic (E.N Malyuga, S.N. Orlova, E.V. Ponomarenko). Scientific methods, which were used in the study, include the comparative-analytical and the interpretative methods. The data for the research was collected in the Internet, especially regarding the global trends, and gained
empirically, concerning the current situation on the Russian market. The research is multidisciplinary as it refers to language studies, marketing research and social sciences.

3 RESULTS

One of the significant trends of the last years is known as “silver economy”, i.e. the market of goods and services for people of the elderly generation. Thanks to the improvement of the lifespan, a lot of retirees and elderly people remain active during their late adulthood, both because they take care of children and they have their own savings, constituting at the same time active consumers of goods and services. Being free from work, this group of consumers is ready to dedicate themselves to their hobbies, travel and leisure time, except in those cases when they are busy with their grandchildren.

In the West, the participation of this group in society is more noticeable [1], while in Russia the trend is actively leading the late adulthood to gain traction, which testifies to one of the cultural differences [2]. In addition, the aging of the population is an inevitable phenomenon, therefore the importance of this segment in the economy will grow staidly. For many of them, studying languages is a pleasant and useful pastime, that they could not afford earlier because of employment. It is worth noting, that only few language schools have special classes for adult people (Vittoria, courses of Italian language in Moscow, groups 55+: school Divelang, courses of European languages for retirees; International Education, in the city of Perm, groups 50+). However, the lack of specialized groups dedicated to «aged» people in many schools does not mean that they are not attended by them. Moreover, many elderly people feel themselves young and prefer to communicate with those who are younger, not wanting to identify themselves with the elderly. At the same time, they do not demand particular, favored learning conditions. This should be taken into account by marketing experts when reaching this target audience.

It is important to underline that, contrary to stereotypes, at a mature age it is quite possible to study a language. Furthermore, adult people often have a serious and responsible attitude in learning and, thanks to diligence and patience, they achieve good results. If they have already studied a foreign language and they have the habit of learning, the result would be better than that of young people. Accordingly, from the point of view of business this target group is of interest.

Along with this, the health factor represents an extra motivation for studying a foreign language in adult age. Several researches [3, 4] have proved that knowing a foreign language allows to delay symptoms of dementia and the syndrome of Alzheimer disease in 4-5 years. Certainly, learning foreign languages will not help to cure elderly people already suffering from mentioned age-related diseases; however, they still help, to some extent, to improve memory and emotional condition.

It can be assumed, that this category will include active people of retirement age (55-70 years old), who have free time and who previously have worked especially using intellectual abilities (most likely, possessing more or less broad cultural outlook and interests). These consumers could pay classes for themselves or could be helped by their children. In practice, in these cases gift vouchers work extremely well: children give as a present to their parents a voucher for several classes (supposedly 5) and parents are likely to start studying so as not to upset relatives. During the first classes an important role is played by teachers, who have the task to arouse students’ interest and find the right approach to use with them. However, there is a high probability that participants will get involved in classes and continue to study by paying lessons independently. Individual classes are more likely to suit an elderly audience, because in this situation it is easier to find a common language with the student and adjust to his/her personal characteristics. However, social factors are involved: a lot of elderly people lack in communication abilities and in this case, participating in group classes will be of additional value for them. Communication with people of the same age, exchange of opinions and, alternatively, joint leisure time will surely be of interest for many elderly people.

In this context, it should be noted that in the framework of corporate social responsibility several companies and organizations pay attention to well-being of elderly people and to their integration in the social life. As stated by the following examples:

- MTS company opened the «MTS Academy» and the project «Networks are submissive to all ages», according to which to elderly people is explained, in a comprehensible way, how modern smartphones and internet technologies work.

- Pension Fund of the Russian Federation and joint-stock company «Rostelecom» organized a project «The ABC of Internet» to help those who wish to learn how to use internet.
In the South-West district of Moscow, and then in other cities the project «University of the third age» was launched. It is a new kind of work with the elderly generation, which includes the organization of educational courses, creative workshops, and courses according to various programs. Elderly people are offered both spiritual and physical growth. In the same way, private leisure centers are also organized in other cities, as for example, the School of the Third Age in Saint-Petersburg. Retirees are offered the opportunity to attend lectures and classes for free (literature, religion, foreign languages, bicycling and many others). The main aim of the social-charitable project is to organize entertaining spare time for elderly people, involving them in the social life, giving them the opportunity to engage in activities of creativity and self-development.

Business school «Mirbis» opened the Institute of Labour Longevity, in which people of the third age are encouraged to improve their legal and financial literacy, receive actual practical knowledge and share experiences. This project is mainly devoted to employ elderly people and to use their invaluable living and professional experience.

Nowadays there are a lot of projects of this kind and they can be explained both by economic motivations (difficult financial condition of retirees), and social ones (elderly people constitute a great resource for society and they can be helpful thanks to their acquired experience and valuable skills). Such a practice is of a great feature, especially with the participation of large companies that are aware of their social responsibility and build their business taking this in to consideration (see ISO 26000). For this reason, the possibility of integrating courses of foreign language in the CSR system will be further discussed in detail.

Considering useful language skills which can be offered to working pensioners, first of all, conversational English should be mentioned. In particular, it is demanded in business communication and it constitutes the universal means of intercultural communication.

However, if the focus is placed on leisure centers for elderly people, other languages can be demanded. For example, the German language, considering that earlier it was studied at school and it is possible that someone wishes to revitalize knowledge (in the leisure centers of Moscow courses of English or German language are offered to elderly people). Languages associated with warm countries and the “good life” (Spanish, Italian), should interest this group of clients. Lessons of language can and should be combined with conversation about the culture of a country in order to motivate students.

Generally, classes in these centers are free of charge or for a very low fee. However, it should be noted that the teacher in any case benefits from working with this audience. Firstly, elderly people have friends and families, grandchildren who are students and may need a private tutor. Secondly, the cooperation with the city administration can also be a step on the road to career development. In addition, an important role is played by the territorial factor, i.e. these social centers are located in every district of Moscow, so they are convenient both for teachers and clients.

Considering one more modern trend, namely the striving for a healthy lifestyle and the prolongation of youth, another target group can be analyzed. It consists of people of middle and early retirement age, who take care of their health and strive for development. Usually, these are educated people, who work (working women), with or without families (often with very solid families and a stable life), who actively spend their leisure time. These people usually read a lot, they are not indifferent to current events, and they are prone to philosophical understanding of life. Learning a foreign language is a hobby for them, especially if they travel. In addition, conversations with a teacher in a foreign language, discussions about the latest news, novelties of literature and cinema are some kind of intellectual leisure activity. The same learning process gives pleasure to this kind of clients. Usually, they quickly grasp the material and during the lessons, time can be devoted to non-technical questions (grammar, sentence construction, etc.), but to the content. It means, to choose topics for discussion, which are interesting for the client, to select relevant articles from foreign media, looking for information about interesting places and events to visit, etc. It is important to note, that this group of population is quite numerous in big cities, although, the market of foreign language lacks offers to address to this segment.

The aspirations of these mentioned groups of our potential clients exactly correspond to another significant trend, the lifelong learning, i.e. learning throughout life (see the European Commission program). Lifelong Learning is the concept of incessant, voluntary search for new knowledge, which is inspired by professional as well as personal motivations. A similar way of living allows professional growth and competitiveness in the labor market, and at the same time it is the most important part of
the personal growth. Besides, all across the country, the mass acceptance of this concept has a beneficial effect on the formation of human and intellectual capital and its quality, and thereby it helps the development of economy.

The concept of lifelong learning assumes that it should encompass people regardless of their age and field of activity, and at the same time provide them with the opportunity to implement and develop any educational interests and preferences, including different forms of distance teaching [5].

The idea of lifelong learning carries a powerful ethical and humanitarian charge. It is based on such values as cognition, investigatory spirit, service to people and society, unity of the development of mind, spirit and body. Such training can be achieved both by formal methods – receiving education, practice, mentoring, training courses, professional development; as well as informal methods, i.e. by properly extracting new experiences from life itself.

Talking about teaching and education, Foresight «Education 2030» [6] should also be mentioned. It includes the main social trends, which affect the education system and the changes that may occur by 2030. Among them there is the aging of the population and the active role of elderly people in society. Along with this, in the survey attention is given to several phenomena such as: the general digitalization, the personalization of the education, as well as supra-subjectivity or interdisciplinarity of teaching. This will be expressed by the combination of consulting and business school (which is already happening now), the convergence of professional and personal education, the changing of the status and system of universities. The impact of these trends, on the teaching of foreign languages, is taken into consideration in the following part.

The universal, widespread accessibility of the internet and technologies has already influenced education, and these changes are irreversible [7]. There is a great number of programs for learning foreign languages and it is possible to download applications on the smartphone or computer. At first glance, it may seem that the profession of the teacher has come to an end: why spend money on classroom courses, if students can do it by themselves? However, experts know that it is impossible to replace the teacher with an application for the smartphone. Even because the factor of the personal communication is involved, not everyone can force him/herself to study without being controlled, etc. Effective could be the addition of traditional classes (in group or individual) by practicing grammar, vocabulary or other languages components through programs and applications [8]. Programs, such as Skype, WhatsApp, FaceTime and others do not limit the teacher and students geographically. These tools, on the one hand, oblige the teacher to keep abreast of the latest innovations, but on the other hand, allow to attract students due of their flexibility in time and ways of communicating. After all, an additional value which increases the clients' satisfaction is given by the use of WhatsApp and Skype. The teacher can promptly answer the student's questions through WhatsApp, sending links to the exercises or resources and he/she can lead the lesson through Skype when both teacher and students can not be present in class.

When the focus is placed on group classes, internet resources give students the possibility to train independently, work on the material already studied in class and also communicate with native speakers. The teacher in this case can provide guidelines and advise the most effective means for an independent work.

Having studied the report on the future of the International Economic Forum in 2016 and the Skolkovo «Atlas of new professions» [9] (based on the investment plans and strategies of the largest Russian companies), the journalists of the online edition of Downtown.ru gave their forecast about the professions of the future. All these new professions are linked to IT and one of them is the manager of educational trajectories. This is a person that will create a strategy to acquire new knowledge and education in the chosen field, studying psychological, physical and other characteristics of the person, his/her temperament, interests and abilities. The developer of the educational trajectories will create the learning plan using large data and global networks – in which college to enroll, which special courses to attend, where to complete the internship, which classes are to attend online and on webinars, which books and media to read, where to go on a trip, who to follow on social networks and so on. This trajectory, together with the emergence of new educational sites, will help to fully realize a person’s mental potential.

Actually, it is possible to address authoritative teachers (experts) with requests of advice: where it is better to learn a language, with the help of which method, in which college enroll, etc. And currently there are consultants and coaches in foreign languages. But the emergence and diffusion of educational sites (Arzamas, TED, «theory and practice»), remote acting learning programs (Coursera), and new popular scientific media and magazines (N+1, Apparat, Edutainment, The Verge)
will make the work of the manager of educational trajectories very important. Obviously, in future this trend will develop even more and it will have a large coverage thanks to the internet. It is important to understand that a good teacher must be well informed and able to give recommendations today.

Another electronic product, which has a huge impact on the market of foreign languages teaching is online-translators. It is difficult to overstate their value, both as translators and teachers of foreign languages. To understand the general meaning of documents, websites, publications it is possible to use online translators so the need of a specialist is no longer required. Moreover, even professional translators widely use machine translation and they only spend time, respectively, on editing and proofreading. Once, before traveling abroad, many used to take lessons of foreign languages, at least in order to refresh knowledge. But today, there is no need. In addition, if an online translator cannot be used in some situations or it cannot help, the English language would serve the purpose, as it is spoken by the whole world. Thus, a key question arises: why do people learn a foreign language?

- To have a general education, usually children are pushed by parents (as previously they used to study Latin and Ancient Greek).
- Under the request of the employer or the educational institution.
- As a hobby (because they are interested in the country or they just like learning a language).
- For self-development, usually adults.
- To have a more pleasant communication and better understanding (when you already have knowledge of English, but you want to learn more).

An important and already mentioned trend is interdisciplinarity, or supra-subjectivity. For those who work with young people, it is obvious that they think differently. The discussion is about clip-on thinking: they have an opportunity to find everything on the Internet and as a consequence there is a lack of need to acquire information. In this regard, they are trying to reform the system and the principles of training in secondary and higher education, even though it is not easy. In Finland, for example, schools are already going to change the approach to ‘standard subjects’, in favor of studying topics and phenomena. Today, the most widespread Communicative approach to the study of foreign languages in the world focuses on the content rather than on the form of utterance, text, speech. Meaning that, it is important what is said, but not how it is uttered. It is important to be understood and understand the interlocutor. This leads us to the idea that the content, the subject matter of the lessons could be an added value for the student. Almost every language school has specialized courses for business and professional communication. However, if the language is learned as a hobby, it is logical to study entertaining or informative subjects, rather than business ones. Targeted-trainings are also gaining popularity, for example, confidential conversations by phone or public speaking in a foreign language.

An important aspect mentioned in many studies is ‘gaming in teaching”, or edutainment, even when dealing with an adult audience. The difference from the traditional learning paradigm is that in this case the participants take an active part in the learning process. They are active users: they can express personal preferences and show a subjective reaction to the experience. Thus, when interacting with an informative-entertaining object and actively participating in the training process, as a result, the participant will acquire knowledge, skills, novelties, individual experience and subjective emotions. The direction of the action of the “edutainment” element can be divided into two large categories. Firstly, it is a way of conveying information and skills to students, which are not motivated. Secondly, it is a learning process, understood as entertainment, in the course of which knowledge and skills can be obtained from sources that were not initially considered as educational materials. Thus, in the first case, there is a passive information perception, whereas in the second - an active process of knowledge elicitation. The use of games and gaming techniques during the lesson is adopted by many teachers, but given the popularity of games like quests, it can be stated, that it is worth considering it a separate sphere of teaching involving the use of games.

Talking about the peculiar issues associated with the young generation (they are also called Generation Z [10]), it is necessary to note the characteristic features of these people. They are called the generation of digital native, although already exists the generation of digital born. Here are some features of this generation with whom we will have to deal in future:

- Selfishness and increased attention towards oneself.
- Low concentration of attention.
Denial of hierarchies.

Observance towards the authorities - opinion leaders (bloggers).

Expectation of immediate benefit and excitement.

Pragmatism, entrepreneurial spirit.

Accordingly, the representatives of this generation will expect to quickly achieve results from language classes, and they will be engaged for some specific purpose. Classes should be fun, and the choice should be approved by the opinion of leaders (for example, a well-known blogger should praise the courses). Memorizing terms and other units of professional language will improve if they are combined with some figurative linguistic means [11; 12].

In recent years, due to the economic boom, the interest towards the Asian countries has become popular. Many people began to learn the Chinese language, with the expectation that business with China will actively develop. It should be emphasized that the demand increased sooner among schoolchildren and university students. For this reason, parents, who are worried about the future of their children, encourage them to learn these languages. Besides, the complexity of the Chinese language and its cardinal difference from European languages makes it practically meaningless to seriously study this language in adulthood. Studying the culture and getting acquainted with the language is a more promising direction, that is why the interest in exotic countries is consistently high, but traveling to the land of the rising sun is not cheap.

The active development of the Arab countries and the Islamic finance system also contribute to the spread of Muslim culture. In the West, this trend is called "Halal economy". In Russia, the demand for the Arabic language is still quite low. In specialized courses, the Quran is studied. Here, students are mostly Muslims, trying to fill the lack of knowledge about their native culture and religion.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the above data, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The target group of elderly people is becoming more and more numerous and active. At the same time, the market for this audience is in the process of formation and will grow.

2. The market for English teaching is competitive and full. The market of other languages is less developed, but there are few bright participants. Given the small size of the market, it is dominated by individual participants without a brand.

3. The experience of foreign countries and modern trends show that language ceases to be only an instrument of communication and achievement of professional goals, but it becomes a source of positive emotions. This is due to the satisfaction of knowledge and the aesthetics of culture, which is associated with language.

4. New products have emerged in the language teaching market, such as Lingvo Couching and language training. Lingvo Couching does not require a lot of investments for the teaching process, contrary to the training process (especially on-site ones).

5. The emergence of new methods of teaching is due to the popularity of gaming and the desire of the consumer to obtain concrete benefits in a limited period of time.

REFERENCES


