DIDACTICS ENVIRONMENT AS A METHOD OF PROMOTING MOTIVATION

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the issue of creating a special educational and linguistic environment as a way of enchanting the motivation of linguistic students (using the example of teaching Italian as the second specialty in the Linguistic department of Foreign languages Institute RUDN).

The article discusses the difficulties arising in the process of learning and particularities of teaching Italian as a second foreign language (FL), such as psychological and culturological differences between the students' native language and the Italian language; support and encouragement of motivation; overcoming the psychological barrier that impedes free communication and the knowledge of foreign culture.

Based on the scientific literature analysis an attempt to interpret difficulties was made and it was suggested some options for overcoming them on bases of Russian and Italian methodological schools. The idea of creating a special educational language environment, combining classroom activities with extracurricular work and inclusive education as well as acting as a stimulating, teaching and controlling factor in the process of learning a foreign language is very important.

The necessary condition for the solution of the task is the intensification of the exchange program between the RUDN University and the Universities of Italy, the presence and participation of native speakers, intern-students in the learning process in order to stimulate real communication, collaboration with the Italian Institute of Culture; Dante Olligieri Society; creating artificial environment as a metaphor for the “loss” of one’s own national identity.

According to the results of the experiment a conclusion is drawn on the effectiveness and feasibility of proposed methodological techniques that contribute to the successful mastering of a foreign language and directly affect the formation and development of key competencies for this process.

Keywords: psychological barrier in communication, educational and linguistic environment, encouragement of motivation, extracurricular work.

1 INTRODUCTION

By signing the Bologna Declaration in 2003, Russia joined the single European educational space. This event entailed significant changes in the system of Russian higher schools and made it obvious that new methodological models, schemes, as well as awareness of the opportunities opened up in the field of cooperation between the two universities, were developed. The exchange of students, graduate students training, research work at foreign universities, internship at foreign enterprises – all of the above types of cooperation fully contribute to the integration of Russia into the European educational space.

According to the UNESCO materials, a foreign language is in great demand as a subject of functional literacy along with the skills of working on personal computer and driving a car. Therefore, we assumed that at present all (or almost all) young people know how important it is for a young specialist to speak a foreign language. However, the average test results, low students’ activity at the lessons, poor results of homework assignments and truancy say opposite. Based on the analysis of the scientific literature, we attempted to interpret the difficulties encountered and suggested options for overcoming them on the basis of Russian and Italian methodological schools. After studying and conducting a detailed analysis of the intensive techniques of the above authors we came to the idea of including mnemonics techniques in the process of learning 2FL that contribute to the perception, retention and recollection of new information which actively help to master a second foreign language and, as a result, increase the effectiveness of learning.
2 METHODOLOGY

To solve this problem we turned to the experience of specialists in the field of teaching Italian as a second specialty (L2/FL).

In his writings, P. Balboni, one of the founders of the Italian language teaching method department at the Siena University, director of the University Ca’Foscari Linguistic center (Venice, Italy), considers the peculiarities of teaching the Italian as a foreign language [9]. They are as follows:

- overcoming its so-called “foreignness”, which finds its expression in psychological and cultural differences between the students’ native language and the Italian language;
- support and motivation in learning the language, since the Italian language does not have much practical value as an international means of communication;
- the use of modern didactic materials in the process of learning (written, oral, multimedia) from linguistic and cultural point of view according to modern achievements, as well as the use of authentic texts of different genres and types containing socio-cultural information;
- teachers’ training of modern methods of teaching. Which would combine a high level of language proficiency with a high level of teaching after all, it is this that distinguishes a foreign language speaker from a teacher;
- the search for common ground between Italian and other foreign languages, which the student learns.

And here it is important to talk about the problem, which is closely related to the emotional sphere of a person – the problem of overcoming psychological alienation, which manifests itself most vividly in the process of learning a foreign language, the language of alien, distant. Since a lack of understanding of another country realities leads to its rejection, to the loss of interest, unwillingness to overcome difficulties, and in the end to demotivation. A similar idea is expressed in a Latin proverb “Ignoti null a cupido” that means “there is no desire to the unknown.” The study of many scientists is devoted to the overcoming “a foreignness”. P. Balboni writes in his work “Immersion of the student’s personality in the process of learning a foreign language to the depth of his “self” and reducing psychological distance between his own language, culture and the same concepts of a foreign language require the teacher to take specific constant actions to overcome “alienity” [9].

The transition to the feeling of being “Italian” (the term depaysement (Fr.) means the phenomenon when a student ceases to feel himself Russian, Canadian, etc.) can be greatly helped by the following techniques:

- Conditions for simulating real communication when a student is forced to overcome his psychological distance in a communication situation. This is about intensifying exchange programs between the RUDN University and the Universities of Italy;
- The presence and participation of native speakers, that is the Italians in the learning process;
- The Italian Institutes of Culture assistance, cooperation with Dante Alighieri Society and I.L.E.P. (the Italian language expansion program of the Italy Consulate General Education Department in Moscow);
- Creating an artificial environment in a specific audience as a metaphor for “losing” one’s own identity. It is, for example, about the design of a classroom as a “little Italy”, which will certainly help to create a special atmosphere of authenticity.

The implementation of the above – mentioned techniques, namely, regular linguistic internships in the exchange programs between the RUDN University and the Universities of Italy, the presence and participation in the process of training native speakers students-trainees of the target language, visiting educational and cultural events of the Italian Institute of culture, collaboration with Dante Alighieri Society, attending advanced training courses for teachers of the Italian language through the PLIDA programs (Dante Alighieri Linguistic Program of the Italian language) create a special educational and linguistic environment, which, in turn, stimulates the motivation contributing to the successful learning of the Italian language.

Modern methodological science analyses a variety of factors contributing to the successful learning of foreign languages and directly influencing the formation and development of key competences for this process. Increasingly, creation of a special educational environment is being discussed.
So, V.A. Fedosov considers included training from the standpoint of the “special environment” concept, that is, a combination of two components—representatives of a foreign language environment and a language system, characteristic of various spheres of communication. At the same time, the scientist emphasizes that the included training system “must be presented and researched as a certain kind of language contacts, namely, as a kind of artificial, specially organized, controlled, as opposed to natural, uncontrolled, uncontrollable contacts”. [6] The presence and participation of native speakers in training is an important factor in creating such a speech environment. In our case we are talking about the Italians.

In the process of implementing the included form of education, there is a combination of classroom studies with extracurricular ones visiting cultural and educational institutions, events etc. The language contacts in this case are task-oriented and organized.

According to R.V. Kuleshova, the main advantage of the included form of education is training in the conditions of natural speech communication. The scientist emphasizes the effectiveness of linguistic internships at partner universities. [2]

In solving the tasks of the included form of education, the language environment plays an important role, representing the totality of all specific forms of language functioning, which find their material embodiment in the variety of existing and constantly created written and oral texts. At the same time, training in types of speech activity takes place in close interaction and mutual influence, as it is realized in the natural environment, that is, among the native speakers of a target language.

The so-called “immersion” in the language environment is simultaneously a factor stimulating teaching and controlling the process of learning of a foreign language. The influence of linguistic environment on the accumulation of heuristic semantization of new vocabulary in the process of real speech communication with native speakers of the target language is especially productive. [Ignatova, 2008].

In recent decades in Russia, “included” or “embedded” training has received the designation “academic mobility” and has become a part of educational process. By the way, mobility promotion of both students and teachers, university researchers, is one of the six goals of the Bologna process. Let’s clarify that both “included” and “embedded” training have a common characteristic feature – study abroad.

The goal of our work is to create a special educational environment that stimulates learning motivation and promotes successful learning of the Italian language. In order to achieve this goal, it was decided to assign resources in three areas: classroom work, extracurricular work, included training at the Linguistic department of the Foreign Languages Institute (FLI) in the RUDN University.

3 RESULTS

The study was conducted in 2015-2016, 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 academic years among the students of the Linguistic department of FLI in the RUDN University who study the Italian language as the second speciality of undergraduate programs. Two groups took part in the training course: the total number of participants was 26. Group I included 12 pupils of 8 girls and 3 boys with mostly “good” and “excellent” grades, Group II included 14 students with mostly “satisfactory” and “good” grades.

At the beginning of the study, a survey was conducted to determine the reason for choosing Italian as the second language. The leaders among the reasons for choosing the Italian language were “the beauty of the language” (9 students in Group I and 7 students in Group II); “interest in the culture (5 students in Group I, 6 student in Group II) and the native speaker teacher (6 students in Group I, 4 students in Group II). The participants’ answers confirmed the persistence of interest in Italian culture, as well as understanding of the importance of communication with native speakers.

Therefore, the presence in the education process within the curriculum of the interns students was to some extent a response to students’ requests. In the 1st semester of the 2015-2016 academic year, 3 students from the University of Palermo practiced at the FLI, Linguistic department in the RUDN University: 2 bachelors of the 4th course and 1 master of the 1st course. The main responsibilities of the trainees were to conduct thematic lessons according to the curriculum. For example, in the second year “Italian cuisine”, in the 3rd course “San Remo Festival”, “Modern Italian cinema”, in the 4th course “The Renaissance geniuses”, “President and Parliament. Administrative structure of Italy” etc.

The second direction in the learning process was extracurricular work, the main purpose of which was to achieve motivation to learn a foreign language, to form self-education competence and, as a result,
to increase the time for learning a foreign language. Here, besides the traditional forms of extracurricular work (publishing wall newspapers, watching films in Italian, holding Olympiads) trainee students took an active part in the student association “Young researchers of Italian language and culture”. The first-year master’s story about Luigi Pirandello, Sicilian writer, playwright, Nobel laureate, was unforgettable.

The international events were of great importance. In 2016 the 155th anniversary of the Italian state creation was celebrated, and the Institute of Foreign Languages (IFL) students took an active part in the events organized by the Italian Embassy and the Italian Institute of Culture.

Positive changes also occurred in the third direction. Two female students (Group I) of IFL “linguistics” department at the RUDN University passed internship in Instituto Italiano Florence, Italy.

There were three direction in the work in 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 academic years: classroom work, extracurricular work, included training. That work continued and intensified the cooperation programs between the RUDN University and the University of Italy, but most importantly, influenced the students’ results.

The table illustrates an increase of more than 2 times the number of student interns from Italy. This fact allowed them to be involved in internships and also in the magistracy of the IFL “Linguistics” department at the RUDN University.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic year</th>
<th>University of Palermo</th>
<th>University of Bologna</th>
<th>University of Padova</th>
<th>University of Siena</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-2017</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-2018</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Intensification of exchange programs between the RUDN University and University of Italy, contacts with linguistic schools, expansion of study opportunities in Italy interested students of the RUDN University. Table No.2 indicates a fourfold increase in number of students trained in Italy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Istitto italiano Firenze</th>
<th>Camus Magnolie Castelraiondo</th>
<th>Centro italiano San Remo</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-2017</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-2018</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The intensification of international contacts, participation in the training of Italian student-interns, the included training, the development of exchange programs between Russia and Italy have positive results: an increase in number of people, who want to learn the Italian language, more than twice. The results of our work are evident in the data of Table No. 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic year</th>
<th>Bachelor's degree</th>
<th>Master's degree</th>
<th>A number of groups</th>
<th>A number of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015-2016</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-2017</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017-2018</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 CONCLUSIONS

A study conducted in 2015-2016, 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 academic years among the students (26 participants) of IFL “Linguistic” department of the RUDN University and our observations allowed us to make the following observations:

1 The creation of special educational environment, an atmosphere of creativity and cooperation, immersion in the language environment demonstrates a significant positive impact on the process of overcoming “foreignness” and psychological distance during the study of a foreign language thanks to informal communication outside the classroom regular linguistic studies of the internship, etc.

2 Overcoming psychological distance, acquaintance with the rich cultural and linguistic heritage of Italy, interaction with all participants of the educational process; teachers, trainees, tutors – are the factors in the formation of motivation and strong interest in learning a foreign language.

3 The linguistic environment is both the result and the one of the necessary conditions for the process of communication with native speakers; it act as a stimulating teaching and controlling factor in the process of learning a foreign language. The influence of the environment on the accumulation of new vocabulary as a result of real speech communication with native speakers is particularly productive.

4 The exchange programs between the RUDN University and the Universities of Italy, cooperation with Dante Alighieri Society and continuing education courses on PLIDA program expands the range of opportunities for teachers through understanding the New perspectives of developing the European educational sector, facilitating the exchange of ideas, views on topical issues of foreign languages (FL) teaching methods, enriching the experience of research, helping to use the latest teaching techniques and developments, as well as introducing the results of the implementation into practice.

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REFERENCES


