

RLMSEE-2020**The Russian Language in Modern Scientific and Educational Environment****GENERATION THEORY AND INTERNET TECHNOLOGIES IN
TEACHING RUSSIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

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Abstract

The research provides a brief overview of scientific works on the theory of generations, considers Internet technologies that are relevant in teaching Russian as a foreign language, reveals the relationship between the use of distance learning and representatives of different generations (generations of "baby boomers", X, Y, Z). The authors attention is focused on the peculiarities of the distance learning perception by students and teachers of different generations. For the analysis, a questionnaire was carried out. The relevance of the research is due to the increasing interest in this topic under the influence of modern conditions. The scientific novelty lies in the identification of specific features that arise in the process of implementing the distance learning format, depending on the affiliation of the participants in the process to a certain generation. The purpose of the study is to identify the features of the relationship between the use of distance learning and representatives of different generations. The main research methods involve observation, questioning, descriptive-comparative method, elements of the statistical method of data processing and the method of contextual analysis. The object of the present paper is the use of distance learning. The subject of it is the peculiarities of using distance learning by representatives of different generations. According to the results of the survey the connection between such representatives and their ways of interaction with distance learning were revealed. It was also examined which difficulties they usually had, what were the characteristics and positive aspects.

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Keywords: Distance learning, generation theory, Microsoft Teams, open-type questionnaire, Russian as a foreign language, Telecommunication Learning Management System



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1. Introduction

The generation theory is a modern trend about the deep values of a number of generations, which arose at the intersection of marketing, economics, management, sociology, psychology, psycholinguistics. Its founders were American scientists - economist and demographic specialist Neil Howe and historian and writer William Strauss (Strauss & Howe, 1991). They drew attention to the "generations conflict", which is based not on age-related contradictions, but on values that are guided by representatives of two generations. This doctrine also received its further development in Russia by Evgenia Shamis and Evgeny Nikonov, authors of books on the generations theory (Shamis & Nikonov, 2016; Shamis & Nikonov, 2019; Shamis & Nikonov, 2020a; Shamis & Nikonov, 2020b), the creators of the RuGenerations project - the Russian school of the Generations Theory (<https://rugenations.su>), which collected various materials and studies of the age characteristics of Russians. The development of the generations theory has become widespread in recent years, which indicates an increased interest to this topic and proves the relevance of the chosen direction of research.

The essence of the problem in interaction between generations is of a certain concrete historical nature, which must be taken into account when introducing learning technologies, especially nowadays.

Modern educational technologies under certain conditions of their application can be used to achieve different results. There are various classifications of educational technologies and its components (Stillman, 2018; Yanitskiy et al., 2019) and one of them is the distance learning system, which has become extremely popular, until recently was considered as an innovation (Popova & Chikova, 2014). Today it is an integral part of the educational process.

An important feature of modern education is its continuous improvement. In the context of the transition to new generation standards in the educational process of the university (Federal State Educational Standard, 2018) there is an urgent need to use modern educational technologies. Due to scientific and technological progress, informatization of society students are required to master special qualities in the modern educational process. The labor market waits for specialists who are able to analyze the problems and situations that arise in professional activity; who are able to suggest ways to solve these problems. The personality must be multifaceted, capable of introspection, self-esteem and self-development. Therefore, it is necessary to use teaching methods that would contribute to the development of creative, communication and analytical skills, as well as intensify the educational process, making it more productive and interesting for the students. The use of distance learning technologies makes it possible to solve the problem of lifelong learning even in conditions of restrictions caused by the current world situation. Considering the relationship between representatives of different generations and modern learning technologies, identifying their features, we can talk about the possibility of effective use of distance education even while full time education.

2. Problem Statement

In modern society, in the era of technological progress, life "online" affects all areas of human activity, including education. Modern students studying at universities, according to Prensky, can be attributed to generation Z (Prensky, 2001). The relationship between generational Z values and the

characteristics of their learning is, in our opinion, an important problem of the interaction of different generations representatives within the learning process. According to the study (Yanitskiy et al., 2019, pp. 46-47) «their (generation Z representatives) the most characteristic feature is the priority of self-sufficiency and independence, at the level of normative ideals determining the focus on the values of “self-exaltation”, at the level of individual priorities - openness to changes». Therefore, in the process of teaching students, generation Z representatives it is necessary to take into account such feature as an independent search for solutions to the issues that they face.

3. Research Questions

Consider in more detail the generations theory in the works of Russian and foreign scientists.

A generation is a group of people which were born in the same chronological period of time and growing up in similar conditions. Researchers (Strauss & Howe, 1991) distinguish four main groups of generations:

- The "baby boom" generation is people which were born after the World War II (1943-63). The term itself means a significant increase in the birth rate, which characterizes a given period of time. Hence the derivative "baby boomer" - a person born in a period of time, characterized by an increase in the birth rate in the population. In general, "baby boomers" are distinguished by their active life position, optimism and faith in the bright future of the country and the world, as they witnessed the global recovery of the USSR after the war. They are happy and grateful to the previous generation for their freedom and peaceful sky. The main value of this generation is the family. There is a high level of patriotism.
- Generation X – people which were born between 1964 and 1984. The background of their lives is the Cold war with Western countries, changes in the country, shortages, and access to drugs. The level of patriotism is markedly reduced, the sense of collectivism is replaced by a sense of individualism, faith in a bright future is weakening. Against this background, the value of the family is noticeably decreasing, as evidenced by the increased number of divorces.
- Generation Y (1984-2000) is also called Generation Zeros or Millennials. Undoubtedly, the formation of their personality was significantly influenced by the disintegration of the country, the increase in the crime rate (90s), innovations in the school system - the Unified State Exam. Of course, all these changes are taking place in conjunction with the development of digital technologies, allowing millennials to leave real life for a virtual world where there are no confines. At this time, such a concept as downshifting appears - a deliberate rejection of prestigious, but routine work and a radical change in life (for example, it is often a move to the ocean). This generation values most of all freedom of choice.
- Generation Z are people born after 2000. They are often referred to as the “digital generation,” “digital people,” or the “button-finger” generation. These are people who were born with a tablet in their hands and started talking after they mastered gadgets. In this regard, we can talk about such traits as impatience, the inability to concentrate for a long time, the rapid loss of interest in something. This is a generation that combines virtuality and reality. On the one hand, they are able to find any information on the Internet in a second, on the other hand, this

eliminates the need to solve problems on their own, makes them very dependent on gadgets, which leads to the fact that they spend most of their time on the Internet.

There are both supporters (Prensky, 2001) and opponents of this theory (Hoover, 2009; Strauss & Howe, 1991), but knowledge about the characteristics of each of the generations can facilitate communication between representatives of different generations, as well as predict their possible behaviour.

Continuing research in the light of the Generations theory, the American researcher Prensky in his works (Prensky, 2001) proposed the division of generations into “Digital Native” and “Digital Immigrants” (2001). The boundary between these two groups corresponds to approximately 1980-s birth. “Digital Native” - term for people born after the digital revolution and accustomed to receiving information through digital channels. Due to the sheer volume of interaction with ubiquitous environment modern students think and act very differently from their predecessors.

In further developing of the Generations theory Don Tapscott in his works offered a detailed description of “net-generation”. He supposed that such generation is a first in the history when children are more comfortable, knowledgeable, and literate than their parents with an innovation central to society. «And it is through the use of the digital media that the Net Generation will develop and superimpose its culture on the rest of society. Boomers, stand back. Already these kids are learning, playing, communicating, working, and creating communities very differently than their parents. They are a force for social transformation» (Tapscott, 2008, p. 2).

Some researchers share the point of view of Prensky regarding people generations, while others, on the contrary, offer their own ideas on this issue.

American philologist Mark Bauerlein, in his book “The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future: (2009), examines modern American youth who, despite technological advances, especially the development of the Internet, have not become more educated or intelligent. In his opinion, young people began to devote less time and attention to reading and writing. Their perception of the world and of themselves has narrowed to the size of a computer screen: they only thing that they usually do is post texts, pictures and videos that are far from highly intellectual content (Bauerlein, 2009).

In 2008, Gary Small & Gigi Vorgan published “IBrain: Surviving the Technological Alternation of the Modern Mind” (2009). Covering the transformation of the human brain under the influence of the eras change, they also mentioned "digital natives". The authors noted that objects of the digital age can influence the young brain in different ways: on the one hand, develop it, and on the other, affect some of its areas that are responsible for intellectual abilities and the emotional sphere (Small & Vorgan, 2009).

Apostolos Koutropoulos (2011) in his research “Digital Natives: Ten Years After” starts a controversy with Mark Prensky and his conclusion, provides some arguments.

- Large differences in the level of accessibility of computers and other digital devices.
- The passivity of the “digital natives” on the Web and imperfect skills in using digital devices: not all representatives of the “network generation” prefer to use Internet resources and, moreover, not all are good enough to do this. Kutrupolos also notes the fact that some

representatives of the so-called "digital immigrants", at times, are more knowledgeable than the younger generation.

- According to recent studies, also cited by Kutrupolos, many schoolchildren and students have conservative views on the education system and do not need to change it fundamentally. Some of them are even sceptical about the introduction of new technologies into educational process.

Michael Walsh, a manager of content strategy at Publicis Sapient has a slightly different interpretation of the term "digital natives". In his opinion, these are the people «who were simply born in an era completely immersed and dependent on the technological process» (<http://wordsofwalsh.com/digital-transformation>), in connection with that «they completely rely on objects of technology in performing everyday tasks solely for their own good» (Walsh, 2013).

In 2007, two American entrepreneurs, Josh Spear, creator joshspear.com, and Aaron Dignan used such a term as "born digital" in a presentation at Google's Zeitgeist (joshspear.com) in May. Subsequently, holding conferences in Europe, they used the term "Digital Generation". Also in 2007, Gartner company already developed a suite of technologies for the "digital person" and demonstrated a number of digital trends at the IT Expo (Emerging Trends) Symposium in Barcelona (<https://www.gartner.com/en/conferences/calendar/all/all/it-symposium-xpo>). The content of that concept is close to the "Generation Z". It means: "Digital man" –someone who is seen as the main inhabitant of the "digital age" (Schmidt & Hawkins, 2008).

The concept "Digital Native" is closely related to the "Digital Tribe", which unites those who were born in the digital age into a single digital community called a tribe.

The digital generation (generation Z) has a positive attitude towards the introduction of different innovative technologies (Ndyay et al., 2020) and also actively uses the digital environment in their daily life, which makes it possible to talk about the application and need of using digital linguodidactic as an interdisciplinary industry that studies the theoretical and practical aspects of the use of digital technologies in teaching language, including RFL and existing special services and resources. According to Prensky, «Our students have changed radically. Today's students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach» (Prensky, 2012, p. 68). The digital environment that surrounds us is multimodal, that is, the text is not the only and not the main carrier of meaning. Multimodal texts combine written language signs, images, font, icons, position in space, sound, video sequence. Interactive digital environment is active, the user interacts with the environment, and it provokes the user to interact, while most of the resources in the digital environment are built on the principles of the game. The digital environment has great potential for creativity.

Online learning appeared at the beginning of the 21st century. For example, the virtual learning environment Moodle was created in 2002 and is successfully applied in modern education around the world. Here are some examples of services that provide support in the educational process:

- Quizlet.com – a service for creating simulators and tests;
- Scribble.com – a service for creating interactive tasks for working with text;
- Worditout.com – a service for creating word clouds;
- Playposit.com – a service for creating interactive videos with built-in tasks;
- Wizer.me – a service for creating interactive worksheets;

- Realtimeboard.com – a service for collaboration with interactive whiteboards;
- Kahoot.it – is a service for creating interactive quizzes of “your own device” format.

The variety of platforms and services is not limited to those mentioned above, «A lot of resources for teaching and learning Russian are uploaded online daily» (Vyazovskaya et al., 2020, p. 82). Such services are interesting from the point of view of their application in teaching Russian as a foreign language (RFL).

Distance learning has become a particularly popular learning format in 2020 (Kaverzneva et al., 2020). In RUDN University, such an electronic platform is the telecommunication educational and information system TUIS (<https://esystem.rudn.ru>), which allows you to receive education remotely.

In accordance with that, we can say that Internet technologies, which are more and more included in our lives now, also provide ample opportunities for distance learning, in particular, teaching Russian as a foreign language.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to identify the features of the relationship between the use of distance learning and representatives of different generations.

5. Research Methods

To achieve the goal of the study, an analysis was carried out, during which it was established how representatives of different generations interact during distance learning. An experiment was conducted, within the framework of which an open-type questionnaire was created, which was subsequently sent to teachers and students of 1-4 courses at the humanitarian and non-humanitarian faculties. Based on the data obtained from the survey, we came to the conclusion about the effectiveness of the distance learning format as a pedagogical tool.

The theoretical and methodological basis of the study were the works of Russian and foreign researchers in the field of the generations' theory and distance learning.

In the course of the research, the following methods were used: observation, questioning, descriptive-comparative method, elements of the statistical method of processing the obtained data and the method of contextual analysis.

6. Findings

Many researchers have dealt with the application of distance learning technologies, most of the works are devoted to the theoretical aspects of its application (Popova & Chikova, 2014), which necessitates a questionnaire survey and obtaining practical data.

As the main method of communication with the survey participants, we used corporate mail, functioning at the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia in the form of Microsoft Outlook and Microsoft Teams programs, which can be used by all participants of the educational environment.

In the process of working with a specific course, students and teachers were sent questionnaires in order to identify the features of learning in a distance format.

6.1. Students' survey results

Provide the results of students' questionnaires:

Table 1. Distance learning: adaptation, facilities, difficulties, types of difficulties, distance learning tools (students), %

Baseline characteristics	Respondents' replies
Adaptation to the new learning conditions	
Excellent	13
Well	63
Satisfactorily	6
Badly	18
Convenience of distance learning	
Well	67
Difficult	24
Easy	7
Not sure	2
Motivation level in the distance learning process	
Increased	39
Unchanged	42
Decreased	19
Load level in the distance learning process	
Increased	41
Unchanged	32
Decreased	24
Not sure	3
Difficulties accompanying the distance learning process in the form of timely information	
Sometimes	46
Constantly	33
Rarely	21
Satisfaction with the distance learning process	
Yes	26
Probably, yes	32
Probably, no	18
No	24
Specific characteristics	Respondents' replies
Distance learning technical difficulties	
Constant need to have access to the internet	15
Low internet speed	13
Insufficient knowledge of PC	12
Some lectures were not displayed	12
Not clear what to do	7
Inability to download materials	9
Technical interruptions in the process	17
Poor feedback	16
No problems	11
Distance learning difficulties	
Difficulties with completing practical tasks without teachers' explanations	41
Inconvenience of using sites for distance learning	28
Preparation of large amount of homework	17
Untimely materials and assignments presentation from teachers	14
Forms of work in distance learning	
Posting educational materials	19
Issuing assignments for self-completion	22
Checking assignments for self-completion	18

Conducting video classes	13
Online testing	25
Individual lessons	3
Electronic devices that students most often use	
Smartphone	49
Laptop	32
Tablet	14
Personal computer	5
Advantages of distance learning	
Flexibility of the educational process	23
Ability to combine work with study	17
Adaptability of the learning process (use of information technologies)	16
Learning in a convenient and familiar environment	16
Ease of updating the content and opportunities archiving old material (any educational material remains available for download)	13
Obtaining practical skills	8
No advantages	7
Pluses of distance learning	
Individual learning rate	18
Use of modern learning technologies	16
Improving the quality of teaching, the ability to re-watch the video lecture	15
Ability to download lecture materials, presentations	14
Distance learning can low the risk of infection	13
Additional material on the subject	12
Opportunity to test oneself	8
Self-study	4

Based on the above results of the survey (Tables 1), students noted both positive and negative aspects of distance learning. The greatest difficulties mainly associated with the lack of live communication in the process of explaining the material, the inconvenience of using websites or electronic materials, as well as technical problems caused by the need for constant availability of Internet connection and its low speed. The students also noticed that this format allows them to be in a convenient environment, to save time and money, to combine different ways of learning.

Thus, we can conclude that the majority of students have adapted well to the new conditions of distance learning, but experience some difficulties of a different nature in the process.

6.2. Teachers' survey results.

Questionnaires were also developed for teachers. The teachers were divided into groups that can be attributed to the baby boom generation (13 people, including 2 men and 11 women), generation X (17 respondents: 3 men and 14 women) and millennials (19 people: 1 man and 18 women). As a result of the survey, we received the following statistics:

Table 2. Distance learning: adaptation, facilities, difficulties, types of difficulties, distance learning tools (teachers from “baby-boom” generation/ generation X/ generation Y), %

Baseline characteristics	Respondents' replies		
	Baby-boom generation	Generation X	Generation Y
Use of online resources before the restrictive measures			
Yes	21	38	69
No	79	62	31

process caused certain difficulties, mostly associated with the increased volume of preparatory material, inconvenience of using educational sites, and (in part) with a lack of instructions for the display and use of training materials. The overwhelming majority of teachers (82%) report a noticeably increased workload, while students also notice a decrease in workload. Many colleagues talk about the difficulty of working remotely. Basically, teachers work through TUIS and corporate mail, do not use instant messengers. A large number of teachers noted a decrease in student motivation caused by a new form of work.

Teachers of generation X, on the whole, adapted more easily to the new form of teaching ("adapted well" - 53%; convenience of the teaching process in distance mode: 39% - yes, it is convenient (I like it); the percentage of satisfaction with the distance teaching process is higher), but the process also caused difficulties, mostly associated with the increased volume of preparatory material. The majority of teachers (62%) noted a noticeably increased workload, but many respondents told about unchanged workload level (29%). Despite the absence of problems associated with insufficient knowledge of the PC, colleagues talk about the difficulty of working at a distance associated with the technical side of the issue. Most teachers work through TUIS and corporate mail, and also use presentations and video lectures (while "baby-boomer" teachers ignore these tools). It is important to note that Gen X teachers are more active than baby-boom teachers used educational online resources in their classes or for students to complete homework and consolidate knowledge on the topic, as well as use messengers to work with students. A large number of teachers (like teachers of the "baby boom" generation) noted a decrease in student motivation caused by the new form work.

Teachers of generation Y in general most easily adapted to the new form of teaching ("excellent" - 14%, "good" - 55%, most teachers noted the convenience of the teaching process in distance mode: 51% - yes, it is convenient (I like it). The percentage of satisfaction with the process of teaching in a distance mode is also significantly higher. Difficulties encountered when working in remote are mainly associated with technical problems and with an increased volume of preparatory material. Most teachers, as well as generation X and baby-boom generation, reported a markedly increased workload. Basically, teachers work through TUIS and corporate mail, and also use presentations and video lectures, actively use messengers.

Based on the data obtained, it was found out that distance learning technologies have become in demand especially recently and are used by representatives of all generations but on different levels.

7. Conclusion

Due to the fact that the modern educational system cannot be imagined without the use of information and communication technologies, identifying the features of using distance education by representatives of different generations contributes to better professional and more successful implementation of educational process.

The review on results of this research allowed to make the following conclusions:

- There is a link between the effectiveness of distance education and generations:
- the active use of distance education and the involvement of various technical and electronic tools are most frequent among representatives of generations Y and Z;

- representatives of generations Y and Z master remote technologies quicker, and their application causes less difficulties than for the representatives of “baby-boom” generation;
- representatives of generations Y and Z are more actively using instant messengers and social networks;
- in general, the level of satisfaction from using the distance learning format among students and teachers from generations Y, Z is higher than among teachers from the baby-boom generation;
- teachers from all generations are inclined to believe that the level of teacher employment during distance learning has increased both for teachers themselves and for students. It is also noted that the level of students' motivation has decreased, while the students themselves believe that their level has not changed.
- Representatives of different generations in the distance learning format faced with practically the same difficulties: the amount of material to be checked, unstable Internet connection, technical problems. However, representatives of the “baby-boom” generation more often than others faced with such a problem as a lack of knowledge in using PC and other technical tools.
- The introduction of distance learning is easier for representatives of generation Z than for representatives of other generations, since it causes less difficulties (already familiar technical tools; the ability to use them). They have been already familiar to such a way of obtaining information (representatives of this generation more often than others search for information and work with electronic tools), they are more focused on communication.

Evidently, the revealed patterns allow us to say that there is a difference among representatives of baby-boom, X, Y, Z generations in mastering digital technologies. However, if we are talking about teachers, we can confidently say that they are also active PC users (or in the process of becoming them) like their students and are able to master the features of distance teaching and ways to increase its effectiveness in a short time.

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