

TILTM 2020**Topical Issues of Linguistics and Teaching Methods in Business and Professional Communication****EXPERIENCE IN APPLICATION OF “FLIPPED CLASS”
METHOD IN THE PERIOD OF DISTANCE LEARNING**

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Abstract

The coronavirus pandemic that has spread around the whole world has made adjustments to all spheres of human activity. Many people had to work remotely. During this period, lecturers and teachers also changed the format of their work. They were forced to switch from a real class to a virtual one. This switch caused certain difficulties. Lecturers and teachers had to radically change the style and methods of their work. The usual scenarios of classroom lessons did not yield the expected results in online format. Particular difficulties for teachers of the Arabic language were caused by the ways of presenting new grammatical material to students. In this article, the authors share their experience in using the “flipped class” technique, which is very popular and widespread in the West, and demonstrate an attempt to integrate it into the educational process. The article describes the applied model of the lessons taking into account the specifics of the taught language, and gives examples of the exercises used. The proposed experiment was conducted in groups of first-year students learning Arabic at the Faculty of the Humanities and Social Sciences of RUDN University. The analysis of the results of the experiment showed high efficiency of the chosen approach during the period of distance learning compared to the traditionally used methods. The obtained positive results encourage and stimulate further experiments. The authors hope that the described experience will be useful to teachers of foreign languages.

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1. Introduction

The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic has made significant adjustments to the professional activities of school teachers and university lecturers. Classroom lessons which were conducted according to the familiar, well-established scenario were unexpectedly switched to a completely different environment – the online format.

Even before the start of the period of isolation, it was clear that the new environment would dictate its own rules and the usual working methods would not work. But how should teachers of a practical discipline, namely a foreign language, work remotely? How can they draw students' attention on the other side of the screen? How can they motivate them and make them study independently? How can they optimize the process of presenting new material?

In addition to the general didactic issues, there arose some private problems. The teaching of Arabic as a foreign language in the first year of studies has a number of distinctive features. Students begin to learn a completely new oriental language from scratch, without having any basic knowledge. Moreover, the grammatical system of this oriental language is significantly different from the European languages that are studied at school, and therefore students have no knowledge of grammar that they could rely on. Even the linguistic terms, known from the school course of the Russian language, acquire a different meaning when learning Arabic.

2. Problem Statement

With the start of online classes, there arose even more questions. From the first lessons it became clear that the teachers would have much more work to do, since checking written assignments (after each lesson!) in online format takes a lot of time. The eyes of a computer user get tired quickly. However, this is not a major problem. Distance lessons have shown that without constant monitoring by teachers, the phonetic and graphic skills of students get worse. There was an increase in the number of mistakes in these activities (speaking and writing). Sound transmission by technical means via the Internet is not always at a high level. All this could not but affect the quality of students' pronunciation of specific Arabic sounds. Most students today (as it was shown in the previous studies of the authors (Vavichkina, 2019; Vavichkina et al., 2019) have poor phonemic hearing and when forming auditory and pronunciation skills they need to have a clear acoustic sample of the sound of a foreign language and rely on a visual analyzer (Gilakjani, 2012; Sadovnikova, 1997). However, it was the presentation of grammatical material that caused a much bigger problem.

3. Research Questions

As a rule, when explaining new grammatical material in the traditional format, an experienced teacher always monitors the reaction of the students and, depending on whether they understand it or not, adjusts the presentation of information. The switch to distance learning has deprived teachers of feedback. When displaying a file or a slide on a computer screen, using a virtual whiteboard to explain new material, the teacher cannot be completely sure that the students are listening and understanding him. However, it is necessary to continue mastering the program. So, we need to look for relevant teaching methods that are

effective in the new working conditions (Modern methods and technologies of teaching foreign Languages, 2019; Mortensen & Nicholson, 2015).

Thus, having faced a different reality, teachers were forced to quickly solve a number of pressing issues, namely:

- How should they organize the presentation of new grammatical material?
- How can they make this material accessible and understandable?
- How can they increase students' perception and mastery of grammar, minimizing time for explanation?

4. Purpose of the Study

Based on the questions posed, the main purpose of the study was to find and put into practice an effective model for presenting new grammatical material to first-year students. To this end, the following tasks were set:

- to find a modern teaching method that meets the questions posed;
- to test the chosen method in practice;
- to determine its effectiveness and to justify the expediency of its further application.

5. Research Methods

After analyzing the features of the students' perception of new theoretical material in the conditions of distance learning and after studying the modern techniques of teaching a foreign language, the authors of the article decided to test the “flipped class” method, popular and widely used in the West (Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Bishop & Verleger, 2013; Brame, 2013; Kodirova, 2018; Lebrun, 2015; Nurdinova, 2018; Popov & Popova, 2020; Radjabova, 2017; Tsepov, 2019). The essence of this model is that the grammatical material prepared in advance by the teacher is studied by the students at home. The lesson's time is given not to explanation, but to the consolidation of the independently studied new material. However, the authors introduced their own adjustments into the lesson, due to the specifics of the taught language and the capabilities of first-year students.

5.1. Preparation of material for self-study

To conduct the experiment, a Power Point presentation in Russian was prepared on the topic “Moods of the Arabic verb”. It should be noted that part of the grammatical material (“Subjunctive mood” and “Jussive mood”) had already been explained to the students at the previous lessons. The new grammatical information (“Imperative mood”, “Jussive and negative imperative forms”) was a logical continuation of the previously studied topics and was presented in structural uniformity with them: meaning, form, application. All the explanations were accompanied by illustrative examples in Arabic with their mandatory translation into Russian. Thus, the material proposed for self-study was of a generalizing and systematizing nature.

The presentation was posted on the Telecommunication Training and Information System portal of RUDN University, which is accessible to every employee and student of this university.

5.2. Students' independent work on preparation for lessons

Given the volume of this grammatical material and its complexity, due to the lack of analogy with European languages and the homonymity of particles and verb forms, the students were to do at home the following:

- to independently study the presentation material,
- to prepare questions on the studied grammatical material.

5.3. Checking and consolidation of acquired knowledge

The next online lesson began with the teacher's explanation of the topic studied by the students independently. The demonstration of the presentation slides was accompanied by comments and explanations by the teacher. At the same time, the emphasis was put on avoiding possible mistakes and preventing the students' misunderstanding. Then the students were to ask questions that had arisen in the process of independent work on the grammatical material.

After several control questions that were to confirm that the information had been understood correctly, the students were asked to do some exercises, intended to consolidate the material, in the following sequence:

- Training drills to consolidate the linguistic (grammatical) phenomena (for example, "Make the imperative mood of the 1st verb stem *خرج*").
- Training drills to consolidate the construction of grammatical models of verb forms (for example, "Make all grammatical forms of the 5th verb stem *توجه*").
- Conditional-communicative exercises for language material drills directly in communication.

(for example, to consolidate the imperative / negative imperative form of the verb: "You are in a restaurant and ask the waiter to bring you ... and not to bring ..."; to consolidate negative particles: "Answer the question by using the negative form of the verb in the past and future tenses, according to the model: "Did you eat these cakes? = No, I did not eat and will not eat these cakes").

At the final stage of consolidating the material, the students were given homework to translate the phrases using the new grammatical material.

6. Findings

It should be noted that the effect of applying the "flipped class" method exceeded the expectations. There are several significant positive aspects:

- Double acquaintance with the topic (at home – independently, and at the lesson - with the teacher) allowed the students to better and faster understand the quite complex grammatical material.
- The independent study of the material at home (in a calm atmosphere, at an individual pace, with the possibility of returning to previous information) turned out to be very effective, since you can attend a virtual lesson without listening to the teacher, relieving yourself of the responsibility for digesting the information, but when studying the materials independently the responsibility for the result lies with the student himself.

- “Flipped class” allowed reducing the time for explanations, thereby increasing the time for the formation and consolidation of the necessary skills.

7. Conclusion

Thus, the first experience in the application of the “flipped class” method turned out to be positive. Such a lesson made the students believe in themselves, as they completed the tasks more confidently and faster than usual. It can be assumed that success at a single lesson will be an additional incentive for them to study such a difficult language as Arabic. The teachers’ satisfaction is due to the successful achievement of the goals and a high percentage of students’ correct answers when doing the exercises. Hopefully, the successful experience of the “flipped class” will be of interest to the teachers of distance learning.

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