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LINGUOCULTUROLOGICAL APPROACH TO TEACHING RUSSIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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Abstract

The authors of the article deal with the problems associated with the implementation of the program adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation. This program is aimed at creating favorable conditions for providing vocational training for disabled students. According to the program, vocational training courses should be adapted to the special needs of persons with disabilities so that they can receive education and become full members of society. These students also need equal opportunities for development and self-fulfillment. Since this program is international and it is accepted worldwide, the courses of Russian as a foreign language should also be adapted to the special needs of people with disabilities. The authors of the article claim that it is important to use a linguoculturological approach to teaching Russian as a foreign language to disabled students. Another reason why this approach should be applied is the fact that it is hard for students with disabilities to travel around the world. Since a linguoculturological approach is based on applied linguoculturology and country studies, it gives foreign students an opportunity to get a better idea about the country and native speakers. This approach increases the role of the linguistic and cultural aspect in teaching Russian as a foreign language. Under these circumstances the vocational training programs for students with disabilities should be constantly improved.

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Keywords: Disabled students, Russian as a foreign language, linguistic and cultural aspect in teaching, cultural linguistics.



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1. Introduction

Nowadays, all members of society should have equal rights for education. It goes without saying that the modern system of education should adapt training courses to the special needs of people with disabilities. Inclusive education implies that educational conditions are provided for people with special needs who can learn together with people without disabilities. Inclusive education is different from segregation and integration, as it implies that all students are taught in the same classrooms and groups who have traditionally been excluded have real learning opportunities throughout the entire education period (Kolobova, 2019). It provides for special educational programs that combine the principles of general and correctional pedagogy and create comfortable and peaceful atmosphere. In addition, these programs provide safe and supportive conditions for learning, special socio-psychological support and health-saving technologies (for example, speech gymnastics). The aims of inclusive education are: “a) to support students in their attempt to understand better and learn the content of the lessons; b) to facilitate access to collaborative lessons, dictionaries, and educational material; c) to improve the educational dialogue; d) to encourage communication; e) to encourage participation in cultural events and social activities” (Giannoulis et al., 2013, p. 452).

The term “social inclusion” has a number of synonyms. “Widening participation policies are known by many names in different parts of the world including “widening access”, “fair access”, “social inclusion” and “student equity” (Lambert, 2020, p. 3). Mass Open Online Courses (MOOC) are one of the forms of such policies (Lambert, 2020; Marta-Lazo et al., 2019).

Firstly, we would like to note that it has now become easier to teach people with disabilities through advanced distance learning technologies. Secondly, white collar job markets become saturated; therefore, applicants should have high qualifications to get a job.

It is crucial to develop methods of teaching foreign languages to students with disabilities, since in the modern conditions graduates with foreign language skills have better job prospects. Disabled people can do intellectual work that is why they need to develop foreign language skills for easier socialization: “An ability to understand and practice foreign languages with native speakers is a source of personal development; in addition, in the context of economic integration, fluency in several languages provides a wide range of professional opportunities and facilitates labor mobility” (Gulaya & Romanova, 2017, p. 193).

Of course, this is a comprehensive problem since we have to consider several factors:

1) a category of disability: hearing impairments (deaf or hard-of-hearing students), vision disability (blind or visually impaired students), speech disorder (alalia, dyslalia, dysarthria and logoneurosis), emotional-volitional disorders (Autism Spectrum Disorders), musculoskeletal disorders and mental retardation. Some students may have more than one disability.

As for the involvement in the educational process, disabled students can be divided into three groups: students who do not require a special approach to learning; disabled students with special educational needs; students who need modified teaching methods, techniques and approaches to learning due to health problems, learning difficulties and unfavorable living conditions (Pokrivčáková, 2015).

2) specific features and status of the foreign language. Russian is popular as a second language in the global educational space: “Russia is integrating into the world community and the problem of learning Russian for the purpose of communication is especially urgent today” (Lyovina, 2016, p. 42);

3) specific features of the sphere where the foreign language is used. All spheres need employees with business language skills. Many graduates with disabilities look for a job they are qualified for to make a living. Those who get a degree in teaching Russian as a foreign language will be able to use the Russian language in various spheres. If these graduates decide to teach Russian, they can give online lessons and teach students with disabilities. Apart from that, they can translate specialized texts from Russian into different foreign languages and from any foreign language into Russian or work in some spheres of communication where language skills are required. There is also a need to learn a foreign language for special purposes (economics, medicine, military affairs, etc.);

4) the language environment. As a rule, people with disabilities have no opportunities to practice a foreign language with native speakers, which needs to be compensated for. Traditionally, the language environment can be substituted by: foreign language mass media (authentic materials), fiction (translated and original); special communicative texts and interaction with a foreign language teacher. The important linguoculturological component of teaching foreign languages to students with disabilities influences the formation of their linguoculturological competence: “in the process of learning a foreign language, they get an opportunity to improve their skills of communication in the cultural and social space” (Dergacheva & Epifantsev, 2017, p. 142); “The study of other languages provides students’ access to the cultural and intellectual heritage of cultures other than their own” (DiFino & Lombardino, 2004, p. 390).

2. Problem Statement

In the modern world, the number of students with disabilities is constantly growing. For example, in Russia there are currently more than 1,000,000 students with disabilities (the website of the Ministry of Education). Moreover, “it has been calculated that within the next thirty years a number of people with disabilities will increase dramatically” (Tsoy, 2017, p. 22). In both developed and developing countries society has reached the point where “almost all people with disabilities have the opportunity to receive medical treatment and continue to live” (Isherwood, 2017, p. 41).

Since the number of disabled people is increasing, the government has to constantly refine the social assistance system. However, the possibilities of refining in this area are limited. As the demographic situation in Russia and other European countries has deteriorated, the authorities are forced to raise the retirement age and adopt a clear definition of disability. For example, if a person loses his/her arm or leg, he/she is not considered legally disabled (Chepurnoj, 2015).

It is known that in the early 21st century, developed countries, including Russia, promoted social inclusion and prioritized a broad programme of ‘welfare-to-work’ and sustained employment. Thus, the number of enterprises employing disabled people increased (Alexandrov, 2017; Zotova, 2018).

Nevertheless, the approaches to the problem are different. So, in Russia there are vocational training courses adapted to the needs of people who suffer from musculoskeletal disorders. After doing these courses, people with disabilities can provide for themselves and they do not need state support. This is a

reasonable approach because people suffering from musculoskeletal disorders are mentally healthy; they have human needs, and therefore they can learn and do jobs that do not require physical activity.

As for inclusive education for foreign students with special needs in Russia, much attention should be paid to teaching Russian. If foreign students master this language, they will increase their linguistic and cultural knowledge and overcome the language barrier. Moreover, in the future such students will have more opportunities to get a job in their own countries and in the post-Soviet states.

If a linguoculturological approach is applied, students aspire to increase their knowledge of regional geography, which, in turn, increases their level of motivation.

Moreover, people with reduced mobility can learn through modern technologies and do online courses if they opt for distance learning.

On the other hand, teachers of Russian as a foreign language have to adapt to new conditions, develop new methods of teaching, improve traditional teaching techniques and use additional training materials to develop the students' linguoculturological competence.

In other words, it is crucial to use the linguoculturological approach to teaching Russian to foreign students with disabilities. Despite the fact that they study Russian and practise their language skills at work, they will not be able to visit Russia. Attending the classes, foreign students with disabilities can increase their knowledge of regional geography and learn about the realities of the country. To help learners achieve this goal, the teacher interacts with students in the classroom by talking to them and motivating them to speak; in addition, learners study textbooks and course material. In fact, "a mature person is motivated to study a foreign language if a certain result is achieved" (Skorokhodov & Khorokhordina, 2009, p. 14) in the process of language learning. Young people with disabilities become more motivated to study a language if they learn more about the culture of the country, which emphasizes the importance of the linguoculturological approach.

3. Research Questions

The authors strive to answer the following research questions:

- What is the essence of linguoculturological approach in teaching Russian as a foreign language?
- Why is linguoculturological approach relevant for teaching Russian as a foreign language to disabled students?

4. Purpose of the Study

The study aims to state the problem of linguoculturological aspect in teaching Russian as a foreign language to disabled students.

5. Research Methods

The main research methods of the article are literature studies, analysis, and descriptive method.

6. Findings

Considering the importance of Russian as a foreign language for disabled students, linguoculturological component becomes crucial for the following reasons.

One of the factors motivating foreign students with disabilities to learn Russian is the possibility to enhance their communication skills by visiting the target-language country and interacting with native speakers. It should be noted that in modern cities even those people who have no health problems hardly communicate with each other. Foreign students who visit a foreign country and develop a secondary linguistic personality suffer from a lack of communication even more. This problem is far more serious for students with disabilities, since at home they communicate only with their family members, and in case they come to Russia to study the language, they have a very small social circle.

In this case, teachers of Russian as a foreign language should aspire to help students with disabilities to actively develop their personality (including their linguistic personality) and creativity. Thus, students will improve their communication skills and will be able to participate in cross-cultural communication. Moreover, the learners' level of Russian will increase and they will better understand Russian linguistic culture. As for ordinary students, they can learn the Russian language in the classroom and then take an opportunity to visit Russia where they will continue their studies and learn about the realities of the country. However, students with disabilities can only use available sources of information to understand Russian culture. On the one hand, students have access to a variety of resources, e.g. books on culture and cultural studies, films, television and online forums for communication. On the other hand, students' learning potential and motivation to study a language may be significantly reduced for a number of reasons. For example, they have little opportunity to visit Russia to understand the linguistic culture of the country, to communicate in the language environment and interact with native speakers in different real-life situations. Apart from that, they are unlikely to practice Russian in everyday communication and use different communication strategies. Finally, they cannot develop their spontaneous speaking skills and practice their listening skills through communication with native speakers from different backgrounds and people of different ages, genders and professions.

It should be noted that if a linguoculturological approach is used in teaching Russian to a foreign student with disabilities, the teacher should focus on the personality of a learner who acts introverted in the conditions of the language environment. If a student is an introvert by nature, he/she becomes even more introverted. The specifics of the student's linguistic and national culture and national education system can also be reflected in the way he/she acts.

Therefore, disabled students who learn a foreign language should aspire to develop their speaking skills, memory and ability to think (i.e. basic mental abilities). To keep students motivated to learn, a teacher should take into account the types of disabilities the students suffer from and choose comprehensible material. For example, a teacher can use visual materials (diagrams, presentations, tables and illustrations), audio materials to develop students' memory (rhymed texts), drilling activities and audio-lingual teaching methods. Researchers note that nowadays information technology is "an important component of the effective educational activity that improves classroom teaching and helps to combine distance learning with the traditional educational process" (Deryabina & Dyakova, 2019, p. 722). To improve their motor memory, students can use gestures, draw and participate in language games when they do some exercises.

Educational games help students to memorize things easily. Information and communication technologies also play an important role: “Communication technologies are often said to equalize the playing field, particularly for individuals and communities that have historically been marginalized” (Garberoglio et al., 2015, p. 120). The Internet can become a place for games, virtual excursions and virtual tourism. It is crucial to motivate disabled students who have a specific way of thinking as negative sensory experiences impact learning “in turn causing distraction, anxiety and limited participation” (Jones et al., 2020, p. 11).

From the point of view of psychology, the students with disabilities should improve their foreign language skills, because it is a good way to develop self-confidence and information competence.

Nevertheless, the influence of the classical methods of teaching Russian as a foreign language should be taken into account: students need to compare Russian with their first language to find out their relatedness/unrelatedness (language contact / affinity of languages, affinity of languages / language contact, unrelatedness / language contact). In addition, language interference should also be considered.

7. Conclusion

Therefore, methodologists should focus on the linguocultural component and develop the teaching methods in order that the teachers of Russian as a foreign language can adapt their lessons according to the specific needs of students with disabilities. It means that students should focus on real communication situations to learn about Russian culture, social norms and acceptable behavior. The linguoculturological approach compensates for the reduced mobility of people with disabilities. This approach should be based on modern information and communication technologies in order to recreate linguistic and cultural environment for these students to the maximum possible degree. It should consider the personality of each student. Acquiring Russian as a foreign language specified for four types of speech activity based on the linguoculturological approach is an object of further fundamental research.

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