



РУССКИЙ ЯЗЫК В МИРОВОМ ПРОСТРАНСТВЕ

RUSSIAN LANGUAGE IN THE WORLD SPACE

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Scientific article

Empirical analysis of challenges in learning the Russian language in the University of Nigeria

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Abstract. Learning a new language comes with its own set of challenges, even the brightest students can find the new language to be difficult to understand. Looking at the progress already made in the field of studying Russian in Nigeria in the last fifty-nine years, the language presents some noticeable challenges. This paper is aimed at examining the difficulties of learning the Russian language in the University of Nigeria. A descriptive method was used, and the data were collected as a result of the survey of 36 students studying Russian. The findings revealed that different social and economic factors affect Russian language learning in Nigeria. Also, there was no significant difference in the answers of male and female students about the difficulties in learning the Russian language in Nigeria. Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that different factors (especially level of education, parents' occupation and level of income) are among the major difficulties of learning Russian in Nigerian universities. Thus, the study recommends that Nigeria government should encourage the respective universities to teach Russian with better funding and sponsorship of some programs, such as conferences and seminars.

Keywords: the Russian language, difficulties of learning, university, Nigeria

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Introduction

Learning foreign languages involves learning several components, such as language proficiency, communicative competence and information about native and foreign countries. It is indisputable that gaining knowledge of conventions –



which may include customs, systems of beliefs – as well as system of meanings is also an integral part of foreign language learning. At the age of globalization, there is an increasing demand for intercultural communication competence, which enables people to interact efficiently with each other irrespectively of cultural and social differences (Wagaba, 2010). On a personal level, learning a foreign language takes people out of their imprinted mindset and exposes them to customs and traditions of an entirely different group of people. Their view of the world expands beyond blurbs on the nightly news and into a deeper understanding of how other people think. In terms of community, learning a foreign language will also increase understanding and compassion for other cultures. This becomes a powerful tool in fighting with stereotypes and bigotry (Akporherhe, 2002).

Studying the Russian language in Nigeria dates back to 1960, when the University of Nigeria, Nsukka was established. Like some other newly introduced courses, it started as a minor course but later became a full-degree course. And as a new discipline, it started with only six students who were bold enough to explore into this seeming ‘strange’ area of study. This is because, hitherto, only English and French were familiar languages studied in primary and secondary schools respectively. It is important to note that Nigerian students benefited immensely from cooperation with Pushkin State Russian Language Institute and Volgograd State Technical University. Apart from one-year program for undergraduates, Pushkin Institute succeeded in training several Nigerian students at master’s and doctorate levels. These Nigerians presently constitute the bulk of Russian language teaching staff both at the universities of Lagos and Ibadan (Chukwube, 2010).

In the context of globalization and challenges of multilingualism, the roles and functions of the Russian language in the context of Nigeria continues to be essential. Language learning is considered to be principally instrumental. According to W. Wagaba (2010), language is understood as an essential element of thought processes of human beings, their perceptions, attitudes, self-expression and worldview. Language can be used as a means of dominance, discrimination, exclusion, inclusion and as a tool for political and economic empowerment. Language can also be used as a powerful instrument of development in creating functional and sustainable knowledge networks.

The Russian language is used in international context in the area of diplomacy, business, media and scholarship. Therefore, the ability to speak Russian can be an asset, while inability of learning Russian may be costly, for instance, when communities or countries lack mediators who are proficient in foreign languages. It is especially important in a multilingual environment where access to information on business, education, science and technology is impossible without speaking foreign languages. The imperatives of studying Russian in modern Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. Nigeria needs to be an integral part of the global village where multilingualism is sine qua non. Moreover, considering the leadership role that Nigeria has to play in international politics and diplomacy, by virtue of its population, natural resources, economic and political power, we cannot relegate the importance of major European languages in the curriculum of Nigerian universities, whose central objective is to prepare and provide the much needed manpower for the development of the country and also for the sustenance of its administrative machinery (Chukwube, 2010).

The Russian language, as the *Lingua Franca* of the former Soviet Union, is a world language whose impact on international politics and diplomacy, scientific research, technology, industrial development is universally acknowledged.

Few studies in Nigeria and some African countries, first of all Ghana and Uganda, have been carried out to identify and analyze the challenges of teaching and learning foreign languages, especially Russian, in Africa. C. Chukwube (2010) listed the following difficulties of learning Russian in Nigeria: lack of qualified lectures, astronomical cost of educational program in Pushkin Institute, Nigerian government's inability to sponsor lecturers for refresher courses in Pushkin Institute in Moscow, absence of Russian cultural center in Nigeria, lack of motivation among lecturers and students. I. Csajbok-Twerefou (2013) with S. Chachu and P.T. Viczai (2014) listed lack of motivation, students' attitude to the quality of teaching and the studying the Russian language, students' social background and local language interference as major challenges in learning Russian in the University of Ghana.

According to Wagaba (2014), the absence of affordable and accessible learning materials, inappropriate teaching methods and approaches, lack of interest in the language, students' learning strategies, lack of institutionalized tools and mechanisms to evaluate and assess teaching and learning styles as well as the performance of foreign language students on a regular basis, the absence of a common framework of reference for languages and the decrease in demands of language services in the Ugandan job market constitutes major challenges of teaching and learning European languages in Ugandan. E.G. Okoedion (2019) mentions government attitude to languages, lack of awareness and interest, inadequate provision of teaching aids and self-evaluation mechanisms, lack of lecturers and extinction of Russian cultural center in Lagos. As a result, students who study the course sometimes feel ashamed to identify with the course and often claim to be studying other courses instead.

The aim of the paper

The empirical analysis of the noticeable challenges of learning Russian in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka is the aim of this study. Therefore, the objective of this study is to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the institutional, students' and parental socio-economic factors affecting learning of the Russian language in the University of Nigeria?
2. Is there any difference in the mean rating of respondents on the perceived institution factors that affect learning the Russian language in the University of Nigeria?
3. Is there difference in the mean rating of respondents on the perceived students factors that affect learning the Russian language in the University of Nigeria?
4. Is there difference in the mean rating of respondents on the perceived socio-economic factors that affect learning the Russian language in the University in Nigeria?

Materials and methods

The study which is both empirical and theoretical draws its argument from primary and secondary data. A descriptive method was used and the data were collected during a survey of 36 students (both regular and elective students) learning

Russian in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Out of 36 questionnaires distributed, 33 were retrieved and analyzed, giving us a response rate of 91.7%. Out of the 33 respondents, 25 were female and 8 were male. The data were analyzed using percentage, mean and *z*-test at 0.5 levels. The questionnaire was divided into five sections. The first section presented the respondents' demographic information, the second one contained reasons for learning the Russian language, while the third, the fourth and the fifth ones focused on institutional, students' and parental socio-economic factors that affect learning Russian in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The following null hypotheses were formulated for the study and tested at 0.05 levels of significance:

H₁ – there is no significant difference on the mean rating of male and female students on the perceived institutional factors that affect learning Russian in the University of Nigeria;

H₂ – there is no significant difference on the mean rating of male and female students on the perceived students' factors that affect learning Russian in the University of Nigeria;

H₃ – there is no significant difference on the mean rating of male and female students on the perceived parental socio-economic factors that affect learning Russian in the University of Nigeria.

Results of the survey

Gender. The table 1 shows that the majority of the respondents are female – 25 making it a total of 75.8% of the respondents. Male respondents were 8, consisting 24.2%.

Age of respondents. Age group of 21–25 years which comprises of 14 (42.4%) accounted for the majority of respondents. The remaining respondents which fell into age group of 26–30 years, accounted for 9 (27.3%), 6 (18.2%) and 4 (12.1%) respectively.

Marital status of respondents. All the respondents, representing 33 (100.0%) are single.

Current year of study. Most respondents, representing 13 (39.4%) are first-year students.

Academic achievement of respondents. Most students with CGPA of 3.50–4.49 which comprised of 21 (63.6%) accounted for the majority of respondents.

The table 2 shows that majority of the students over (75%) did not choose Russian language as their course of study.

With the respect to the question whether the students were pleased to be offered the Russian language, the responses indicated that most students which comprised 26 (78.8%) were pleased to be offered the course (table 3).

To affirm their answers, the students were asked to give reasons for being pleased or not pleased to be offered the Russian language (table 4). The responses are essential for the researchers in that they showed some difficulties that students meet in studying the Russian language in Nigeria.

All the respondents were pleased with the quality of teaching (table 5). However, for us it was essential to know the disadvantages of the lecturers and how to develop new strategies to improve teaching. Unfortunately, no students gave

reasons for not being pleased with the quality of teaching the Russian language in the university.

All the students responded that they would like to learn Russian songs. To understand why these responses were given, let us look attentively at some of the reasons shown in the table 7.

Table 1

Respondents' demographic information

S/N	Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Gender of Respondents	Male	8	24/2
		Female	25	75.8
		Total	33	100.00
2.	Age of Respondents	Under 20 years	6	18.2
		21–25 years	14	42.4
		26–30 years	9	27.3
		Above 30 years	4	12.1
		Total	33	100.0
3.	Marital Status of Respondents	Single	33	100.0
		Married	–	–
		Divorced	–	–
		Widowed	–	–
		Total	33	100.0
4.	Current Year of Respondents	First year	13	39.4
		Second year	9	17.3
		Third year	3	9.1
		Fourth year	8	24.2
		Total	33	100.0
5.	Academic Achievements of Respondent	CGPA of 1.00-1.49	–	–
		CGPA of 1.50-2.89	–	–
		CGPA of 2.40-3.49	7	21.2
		CGPA of 3.50-4.49	21	63.6
		CGPA of 4.50-5.00	5	15.2
		Total	33	100.0

Source: the researchers' fieldwork, 2019.

Table 2

Did you choose Russian language as your course of study?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Yes	8	24.2	24.2
No	25	75.8	100.0
Total	33	100.0	

Source: the researchers' survey, 2019.

Table 3

Are you pleased to be offered the Russian language?

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Yes	26	78.8	78.8
No	7	21.2	100.0
Total	33	100.01	

Source: the researchers' survey, 2019.

Table 4

Reasons of being pleased or not pleased to be offered the Russian language

S/N	Reasons of being pleased	Reasons for being not pleased
1.	Russian language is popular	The language is difficult to learn
2.	I love to study the language and hope to travel to Russia in the future	I did not choose it as my course of study, so I have no interest in it
3.	The Russian language is interesting and it has helped me to express myself and improve my academic performance	The writing is complicated
4.	The Russian alphabet is unique and it introduced me into a new culture	It will be more interesting and understandable if it is learned using movies or film shows, etc. It could help improve my language skills
5.	An additional language to my native one is important	I hate languages and this is my first contact with the Russian language
6.	It will expose me to many foreign opportunities	The pronunciation is a little difficult
7.	The lecturers are kind to us and their method of teaching is also very good	Nigerian government attitude towards learning the Russian language is negative
8.	I love the Russian language and it is educative in all areas because it is taught in my university by foreigners	There is no adequate provision of teaching aids and language laboratory in my university.

Source: the authors' survey, 2019.

Table 5

How do you find the quality of teaching?

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Very pleased	23	69.7	69.7
Pleased	10	30.3	100.0
Not Pleased	–	–	
Total	33	100.0	

Source: the authors' survey, 2019.

Table 6

Would you like to learn Russian songs?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Yes	33	100.0	100.0
No	–	–	
Total	33	100.0	

Source: the authors' survey, 2019.

Table 7

Reasons for interest in learning Russian songs

S/N	Reasons
1.	Russian songs help one learn more
2.	Russian songs can also portray Russian life style
3.	Russian songs are interesting
4.	It helps me learn the language with pleasure and in the form of having fun
5.	Russian songs will help in learning pronunciation
6.	Russian songs are entertaining
7.	It will help increase my language proficiency

Source: the authors' survey, 2019.

All the students responded that learning Russian as a foreign language is relevant. Therefore, let us consider some of their reasons as shown in the table 9.

The results showed that seven items out of ten with mean ranging from 3.41–3.85 were considered by the respondents as institutional factors affecting learning the Russian language in the University of Nigeria.

Table 11 revealed that the four items had their mean ranging from 3.00–3.54 which reveals that the four items were considered as students’ factors affecting learning the Russian language in the University of Nigeria.

Table 12 showed that three items had their mean ranging from 3.18–3.57 which shows that the items were considered as parental socio-economic factors affecting learning the Russian language in the University of Nigeria.

Table 8

Do you think learning Russian as a foreign language is relevant?

Response	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Yes	33	100.0	100.0
No	–	–	
Total	33	100.0	

Source: the authors’ survey, 2019.

Table 9

Reasons why you think that learning Russian as a foreign language is relevant in Nigeria

S/N	Reasons
1.	The Russian language is among the official languages in the world
2.	It can help create more job opportunities
3.	It will help us to be versatile in languages
4.	Russians love people who can speak their language
5.	The Russian language is important for foreign exchange
6.	The Russian language is very relevant because of the rate of civilization and globalization
7.	Communication with at least two different foreign languages apart from mother tongue is paramount today

Source: the authors’ survey, 2019.

Table 10

Respondents’ mean rating on the institutional factors affecting learning the Russian language in the University of Nigeria

S/N	Factors	\bar{x}	Remarks
1.	Lack of qualified lecturers to handle the course	2.13	Disagreed
2.	Lack of language laboratories and libraries	3.85	Agreed
3.	Lack of motivation from lecturers	2.27	Disagreed
4.	Inadequate teaching aids	3.54	Agreed
5.	Ineffective teaching methods/approaches	3.41	Agreed
6.	Lecturers’ attitude to the Russian language	2.10	Disagreed
7.	Lack of institutional tools and mechanisms to evaluate and assess teaching and learning style as well as performance of Russian language students on a regular basis	3.69	Agreed
8.	Inappropriate entry requirements for Russian language class	3.37	Agreed
9.	Absence of affordable and accessible learning materials (e.g. textbooks)	3.66	Agreed
10.	Nigerian government’s attitude to learning the Russian language in Nigeria	3.71	Agreed

Source: the researchers’ fieldwork, 2019.

Table 11

Respondents' mean rating on the students' factors affecting learning the Russian language in the University of Nigeria

S/N	Factors	\bar{x}	Remarks
1.	Lack of personal motivation and interest	3.00	Agreed
2.	Differences between native and Russian language	3.54	Agreed
3.	Students' attitude to learning the Russian language	3.10	Agreed
4.	Lack of people to communicate with outside the school environment	3.32	Agreed.

Source: the researchers' fieldwork, 2019.

Table 12

Respondents' mean rating on parental socio-economic factors affecting learning the Russian language in the University of Nigeria

S/N	Factors	\bar{x}	Remarks
1.	Educational level of parents	3.57	Agreed
2.	Occupational status of parents	3.34	Agreed
3.	Income level of parents	3.18	Agreed
4.	Parents' status in the society	2.86	Disagreed

Source: the researchers' fieldwork, 2019.

Testing of Hypothesis

Table 13 reveals that the calculated t value of -0.75 is less than the critical t value of 1.97 at 0.05 levels of significance. This implies that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female students in their consideration of institutional factors affecting learning the Russian language in the University of Nigeria. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Table 13

The z-test result on the effect of gender on respondents' consideration of institutional factors

Group	N	\bar{x}	SD	DF	Standard error	t-cal.	t-crit.	Decision
Male	8	3.76	0.82	29	0.56	-0.75	1.97	Retained
Female	25	3.54	0.68					

Source: the authors' computation, 2019.

Table 14

The z-test result on the effect of gender on respondents' consideration of student's factors

Group	N	\bar{x}	SD	DF	Standard error	t-cal.	t-crit.	Decision
Male	8	3.60	7.73	26	0.48	-0.91	1.92	Retained
Female	25	3.448	0.55					

Source: the authors' computation, 2019.

Table 15

The z-test results on the effect of gender on respondents' consideration of parental socio-economic factors

Group	N	\bar{x}	SD	DF	Standard error	t-cal.	t-crit.	Decision
Male	8	3.64	0.77	27	0.59	-0.84	1.97	Retained
Female	25	3.50	0.69					

Source: the authors' computation, 2019.

Table 14 shows that the calculated t value of -0.91 is less than the critical t value of 1.92 at 0.05 levels of significance. This implies that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female students in their consideration of students' factors affecting learning the Russian language in the University of Nigeria. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Table 15 reveals that the calculated t value of 1.97 at 0.05 levels of significance. This implies that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female students in their consideration of parental socio-economic factors affecting learning the Russian language in the University of Nigerian. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Discussion

The results of the study showed that institutional, students' and parental socio-economic factors affect learning the Russian language in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. As predicated, the study also revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of male and female students in their consideration of institutional, students' and parental socio-economic factors affecting learning the Russian language in the University of Nigeria. These findings coincide with the views of other researches (Chukwube, 2010; Wagaba, 2010; Csagibok-Twerefou, 2013; Csajbok-Tweretou, Chachu, Viczai, 2014; Okoedion, 2019). We also found that all the students like to learn Russian songs. Therefore, lectures should make use of alternative methods such as films, songs, videos and audios during teaching. This will go a long way in motivating students to learn the Russian language in Nigeria. This is aligned with G. Lozanov's (1979) view that using music, films or audios as learning tools in second language learning results in a relaxed state of mind and maximum retention of material. Further, he claimed that the atmosphere created by music, films or audios enhance the students' ability to remember vocabulary words and shorten the period of foreign language studying. In addition, A. Iscan and B. Karagoz (2016) affirm that films and songs help to develop students' language skills, motivation, not to forget the language and decrease affective filter. Therefore, watching Russian films will help students to develop listening and speaking skills, gain language sensitivity to Russia, increase knowledge and cultural accumulation, and students become more willing to learn the Russian language.

Although the current study explored the difficulties of learning the Russian language in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and yielded many unique findings, there are several limitations to this study. The most prominent one lies in the fact that the sample size was relatively small. Also, the study was restricted to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Therefore, we suggest that future studies of this kind can be undertaken to include other universities such as University of Ibadan and University of Lagos, where the Russian language is taught, in order to give deeper insights into the subject matter. The study also suggested that further empirical work should be conducted on a larger sample. Lastly, there is need to study motivation and perceptions of students towards the Russian language in Nigerian universities teaching the Russian language.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study, we concluded that institutional factors, students' factors and parental socio-economic factors deeply affect learning of the Russian language in the University of Nigeria. Based on the findings of this study, the followings recommendations were made:

1. Russian authorities should help through some agencies and donate recent textbooks and other teaching aids to the University of Nigeria as it was once done in the past. These teaching materials will go a long way to stimulate the students' interest.

2. Nigerian government should encourage the respective universities through better funding and sponsorship of some programs in teaching and learning the Russian language such as conferences and seminars.

3. There is need for language placement tests, which would assess the competences of language students before they are admitted to language programs. This will go a long way to equip the students with practical skills and learning strategies to enable them to be in more charge of their own learning beyond the language class.

4. Parents/guardians should intensify efforts to encourage students by equipping them with the recent materials especially textbooks necessary in their Russian language studies.

5. Learning foreign language is influenced by learning environment and the attitude of institutions to the foreign language being learnt. The university authorities should develop programs where interesting Russian films with English subtitles are shown monthly. In addition, officials from the Russian Embassy should be invited from time to time to interact with the students in the form of talk shows.

6. The heads of departments should provide the platform for using film shows, songs and audios or music as learning tools for the Russian language as this will motivate students to enjoy the language and consequently enhance their language skills.

The university management should intensify efforts to provide language laboratory and library. In addition, lab equipment such as laptop, DVD player and a TV set or projector should be provided to enhance learning and teaching of the Russian language in the university.

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Научная статья

Общий анализ объективных проблем обучения русскому языку в Университете Нигерии

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Аннотация. Изучение нового языка связано с определенными трудностями, даже самые способные ученики находят новый язык сложным и трудным для понимания. Несмотря на прогресс, уже достигнутый в области обучения за последние пятьдесят девять лет, русский язык в Нигерии сталкивается с некоторыми значительными проблемами. Это и обусловило цель данной работы – исследование проблем обучения русскому языку в университетах Нигерии. Использовался описательный метод, данные, полученные посредством опроса 36 студентов, изучающих русский язык, были проанализированы и выражены в процентном соотношении. По результатам исследования не было обнаружено значительной разницы в средней оценке студентов мужского и женского пола предполагаемых сложностей изучения русского языка в Нигерии. Сделан вывод о том, что одними из основных, влияющих на обучение русскому языку в нигерийских университетах, являются институциональные, студенческие и семейные социально-экономические факторы (особенно уровень образования, профессиональный статус и уровень доходов родителей). Таким образом, исследование рекомендует правительству Нигерии, среди прочего, поощрять соответствующие университеты за счет лучшего финансирования и спонсорства некоторых программ, связанных с преподаванием и изучением русского языка, проведением конференций и семинаров.

Ключевые слова: русский язык, трудности обучения, университет, Нигерия

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