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Research article

Methodological opportunities for international students acquiring content and language integrated learning in a contemporary educational environment

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Abstract. Russian Federation has consistently ranked among the top ten countries in the world for the number of international students enrolled in secondary and higher education institutions to pursue a specialization. In this context, one of the most crucial and pressing problems of Russian pedagogy is the high-quality education. The current system, however, does not adequately address this issue, as seen by the high number of first-year international students that are expelled each year for not comprehending certain concepts in Russian language. In this regard, the goal of the study was to identify the challenges that prohibit international students from receiving a successful education in Russian universities' junior programs and to devise solutions to these challenges. Monitoring studies were carried out with the help of international students enrolled in the RUDN University's first-year programs for bachelor's, master's, and speciality degrees in order to achieve this objective. The data acquired show that the system of pre-university education for international students has to be modernized in terms of both the Russian language and specific academic areas. Subject-language integration as a learning strategy has enormous methodological promise for raising standards and effectiveness. Content and language integrated learning has a lot of methodological promise for enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the current system. The author take into account and carefully analyze the technologies and guiding principles of this notion in relation to the duties of preparing international students for pre-university education. The theory and methodology of teaching the Russian language and specialized subjects in the Russian language to foreigners with a professional orientation are being developed by this research, which also helps to develop the conditions for maximizing the educational training of foreign students in Russian universities.

Keywords: methods of teaching, Russian language as foreign, professionally oriented teaching, Russian language to foreigners

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Introduction

Recent years have seen a significant increase in educational immigration to the Russian Federation. According to the data of the Ministry of Higher Education and Science of the Russian Federation, the total number of foreigners studying in universities of the Russian Federation in the past three years increased by more than 36,000¹. Thus, in 2022, 351,127 foreign students were studying in Russia, in 2021 – 395, 263, in 2020 – 353,331. In 2021, Russia ranked fifth in the world in terms of the number of foreign students. It is important that the main purpose of foreign students' arrival in the Russian Federation is to receive vocational training. In this connection, improving the quality of foreign students training is one of the most important tasks facing the modern Russian higher school.

The key to the effectiveness of vocational education that foreigners receive in Russian universities, a factor determining the very possibility of obtaining a diploma in the chosen specialty is the initial level of knowledge of specialized disciplines and skills in Russian-language communication in the educational and professional sphere. This level should be achieved at the pre-university stage in educational organizations of the Russian Federation or the country of origin. At the same time, as our analysis shows, not all foreigners who enter the universities of the Russian Federation reach the graduation course. In some professions, such as the life sciences, the figure is only 40 to 50%. At the same time, the most significant number of foreign students are expelled in the first of the second year. This confirms the low quality of the subject and communication training at preparatory faculties and departments of higher educational institutions of the Russian Federation.

The new methodical direction, which in foreign methodical discourse is called Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and in Russian pedagogical science and practice – subject-language integrated training, has a great methodological potential in the sphere of pre-university training of foreign citizens.

This issue began to develop in Russia in the early 2010s. First, methodists and teachers of foreign languages (Almazova et al., 2017; Khalyapina, 2017; Popova et al., 2018; Sysoyev, 2019, etc.) included CLIL strategies in their pedagogical arsenal. Russian scientists studied the history of this methodological direction (Laletina, 2012; Salekhova, Grigorieva, 2013; Zorina, 2021, etc.), its potential in teaching

¹ The number of international students in Russia increased by 8.4% in 2022. (2022, November 29). TASS. Retrieved March 12, 2023, from <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/16453991?ysclid=li8cqj2g8941429522>; Maier, A. (2023, March 13). Russia ranks sixth in the world in terms of the number of international students. *Vedomosti*. Retrieved March 12, 2023, from <https://www.vedomosti.ru/society/articles/2023/03/13/966139-rossiya-zanyala-6-e-mesto-po-chislu-inostrannih-studentov?ysclid=li8cyjji2x737040723>

foreign languages to preschoolers (Vronskaya, 1999; 2016; Barkova, Selivanovskaya, 2020, etc.), in higher vocational education (Loktyshina, Saitimova, 2015; Gulaya, Romanova, 2016; Sidorenko et al., 2016; Sidorenko, Rybushkina, 2017; Zhigadlo et al., 2018; Kolykhalova, 2018; Zorina, 2021; Mironova, 2020; Melekhina, 2021, etc.). Methodists and teachers of foreign languages also analyze the training of CLIL-teachers and CLIL-competences (Sysoyev, 2021; Zorina, 2021; Kudryashova, 2021, etc.), the use of subject-language integrated training technologies in different profiles of professional training (Solomatina, 2018; Tokmakova, 2019; Baydikova, 2020; Kapranchikova et al., 2020, etc.). The Russian methodical discourse describes the pilot projects in Content and Language Integrated Learning: “Business English + Knowledge Management” (Gulaya, Romanova, 2016); “Introduction to Botany: Subject-Language Integrated Learning” (for students studying in the direction of “Landscape architecture”) (Sirotova, 2021), etc.

However, in the field of teaching foreign languages to Russian students, this methodological innovation was not supported by the administrative and other organizational structures of Russian secondary and higher educational institutions. This can be explained not only by the insufficiency of the concept in relation to Russian educational realities, but also by extra methodical reasons. The problem of the quality of professionally oriented foreign language teaching for Russian students is not as acute as the problem of developing the skills of Russian-language professional communication among foreigners, for whom these skills are a key condition of the very possibility of studying in Russian higher educational institutions.

The existing system of teaching foreign students the Russian language and special disciplines in Russian needs updating and modernization, and the first experience of implementing CLIL technologies (including those undertaken by the author of this article) proves its great potential in solving this important methodological problem. At the same time, our analysis of educational publications and theoretical literature on this issue has shown that this new, very promising scientific direction has not yet received recognition among the teaching methods of Russian as a foreign language. Problems of subject-language integrated education of foreigners are considered in few articles of Russian methodists (Semina, 2019, 2020; Ivashova, 2022; Alekseeva, 2023). Only two PhD papers in scientific specialty “Theory and methods of teaching and upbringing: Russian as a foreign language” (Semina, 2020; Alekseeva, 2023) have been written on this topic.

In this regard, **the aims of the study** are: a) to establish the problem areas in the existing system of teaching foreign students Russian language and subjects in Russian; b) to analyse and evaluate the methodological potential of subject-language integrated training in overcoming and preventing the problems identified.

Methods and materials

In order to achieve the objectives, a monitoring study was conducted, where foreign first-year bachelor, specialist and master students of the RUDN University participated. The total number of participants was 532. Special status of the RUDN University, the leading international-oriented university of the Russian Federation, allowed to provide a wide range of the participants' countries of origin. Students from Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Chad, China, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Guinea, Greece, Kazakhstan, Laos, Lebanon, Madagascar, Mexico, Mongolia, Nigeria, Peru, Sao Tome and Principe, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Syria, Thailand, Turkmenistan, Turkey, Viet Nam, Uzbekistan participated in the monitoring. This made it possible to obtain more general, universal data, independent of the specific national academic systems, where general educational skills, cognitive ethnic style and other pedagogical qualities of foreign students formed before their entering to the universities of the Russian Federation.

The monitoring study included several directions. One of the most important tasks was to determine the importance of communicative competence of students for the quality of learning educational programs. In this connection, we included future representatives of both linguoactive professions (in the terminology of N.I. Formanovskaya) and those professions where the skills of communication in Russian are less important than, for example, knowledge of special formulas, symbols, etc. The Russian methodical tradition, linguoactive professions are those where “speech is a means of interaction with people, an instrument of influence on human consciousness”². Therefore, the first group of participants of the monitoring was made up of future doctors, political scientists, international scientists, sociologists, lawyers – foreign students of the Medical Institute, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, the Law Institute of the RUDN University. The second group included future representatives of the linguopassive professions – foreign students of the Academy of Engineering, the Faculty of Economics, the Faculty of Physical and Mathematical and Natural Sciences, the Institute of Ecology of the RUDN University.

The monitoring study started with the questionnaires with general questions on pre-university training of foreign first-year students: place (country, university) and the duration of training, the results of final testing after graduating from the preparatory faculty.

² Formanovskaya, N.I. (2002). *Speech communication: A communicative and pragmatic approach: A textbook for university students studying in the specialty of Russian language and literature*. Moscow: Russkii Yazyk Publ. (In Russ.)

An important direction of monitoring was the establishment of problem areas in learning specialty in Russian. In this regard, the questionnaires included questions on the quality of precepting the material of the major subjects, the clarity of explanation, texts in presentations and what teachers write on the board at the lesson. The students were also asked how teachers explain the meaning of new terms. In order to get the detailed information on problem areas, the questionnaire included questions for identifying the most difficult types of speech activity.

The monitoring study was also aimed at defining the preferable form of educational process for foreign students – full-time (face-to-face) or distance.

The author also considered the forms of monitoring students' academic achievements in Russian universities as a significant factor affecting the quality of professional training of foreign students. Therefore, the questions were also aimed at determining the level of satisfaction with the certification system in the subject, the effectiveness of forms of control, the quality of additional educational (including advisory) support of students in Russian language and major disciplines, use of information and educational resources, specialized teaching aids.

Results

According to our results, 46.2% of the students who participated in the monitoring graduated from the Preparatory Faculty of the RUDN University; 52.5% studied at preparatory faculties and departments of other Russian universities; 1.3% completed language courses or studied independently (Figure 1).

According to the data received, 43.8% of the students completed full-time studies at the preparatory faculties of Russian universities lasting 9 months or more. Less than six months of full-time education were attended by 23.2% of students. For 9 months or more, 20.6% of foreigners had distance learning, and for less than 6 months, 12.4% had distance learning (Figure 2).

In the questionnaires, all respondents reported that they received positive marks on the final exam in the universities where they studied Russian, with a score indicating a satisfactory level of Russian language proficiency: at least 446 points (at least 66% of the test value) with 675 maximum points³. Only one student who studied Russian independently scored less than 446 points.

The problems identified in the monitoring were divided into two large groups:

a) problems that can be solved by optimizing the existing system of professional training of foreign students in Russian universities;

³ *Test of Russian as a foreign language. First certification level. General proficiency* (p. 36). (2018). Moscow, St. Petersburg.

b) problems in teaching Russian as a foreign language and specialized academic disciplines, for which the existing system does not have sufficient potential and, consequently, innovative pedagogical solutions are necessary.

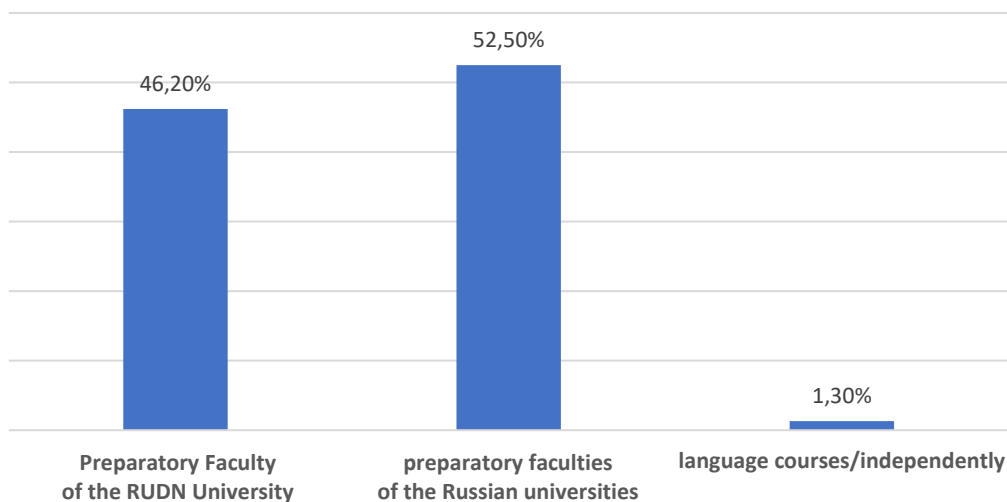


Figure 1. Educational institutions where participants completed their pre-university education

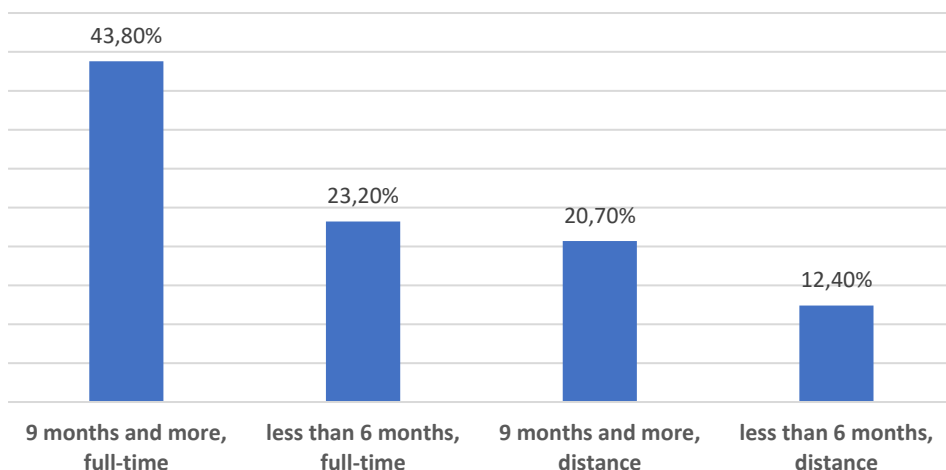


Figure 2. The duration and type of the preparatory faculty's curriculum

The first group includes the following problems, which were indicated by foreign first-year students in their answers:

- 1) large amount of information on specialized academic disciplines (6%);
- 2) incomprehensible explanation of educational material by subject teachers (2%);
- 3) speech quality of teachers of special disciplines (Figure 3):
 - too fast (69%);
 - too complicated (20.4%);
 - too quiet – “the teacher speaks very quietly” (10.6%).

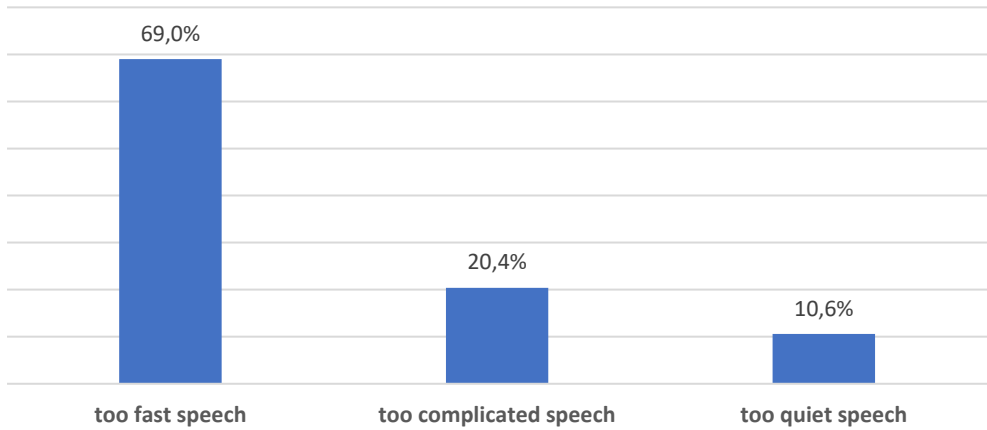


Figure 3. Reasons for students' poor comprehension of educational material: teacher's communication skills

Foreigners said that new terms and unfamiliar words were explained in general by means of periphrasis (40.6%) or translation (14.5%). At the same time, students pointed out that obscure words were rarely explained by the teacher (36.9%) or were not explained at all (10.5%) (Figure 4).

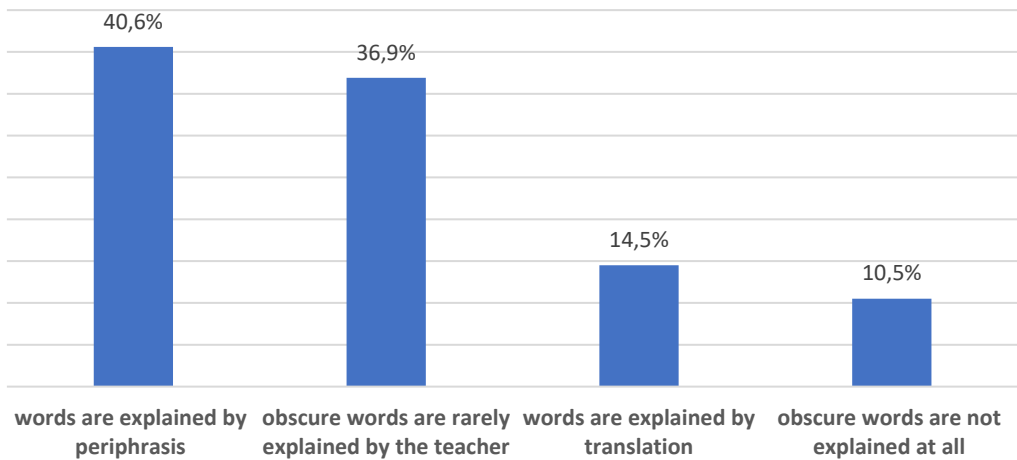


Figure 4. Subject teachers' methods for explaining the meaning of new terms

The monitoring showed that only 35.7% of foreign students understand well the texts of presentations and notes of the subject teacher. Do not understand separate words 32.5% of respondents. Poorly understand the texts of presentations and notes of the lecturer 15.7%. A small number of students do not have time to understand the text of presentations and instructor's notes – too fast pace of presentation (6.9%). At the same time, 9.2% do not understand the notes because of the teacher's illegible handwriting (Figure 5).

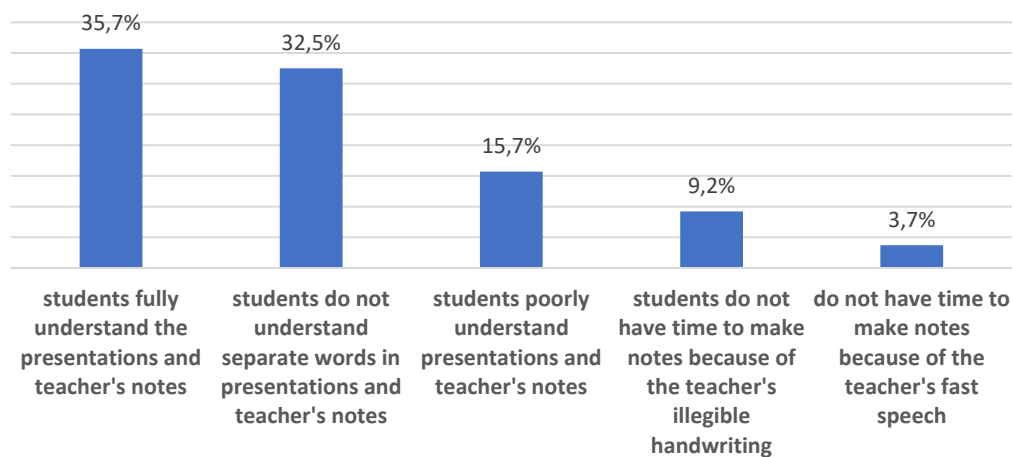


Figure 5. Reasons for inadequate comprehension of educational material: content visualization quality of academic disciplines

When asked how it is easier to listen to lectures, the vast majority of international students chose full-time (face-to-face) format (78.8%). Preferred distance lessons 21.2% of respondents. It is interesting that regular surveys conducted by the sociological service of RUDN University among Russian students show almost equal preferences for face-to-face and distance learning formats. Foreign students gave the following reasons for classical full-time lessons: “classroom work is active, effective and emotional” (61.5%); “there is personal contact with the teacher and with classmates” (23.5%); “the teacher sees whether foreign students understand the information” (12.6%); “the teacher constantly monitors whether we perform the tasks correctly” (2.4%) (Figure 6).

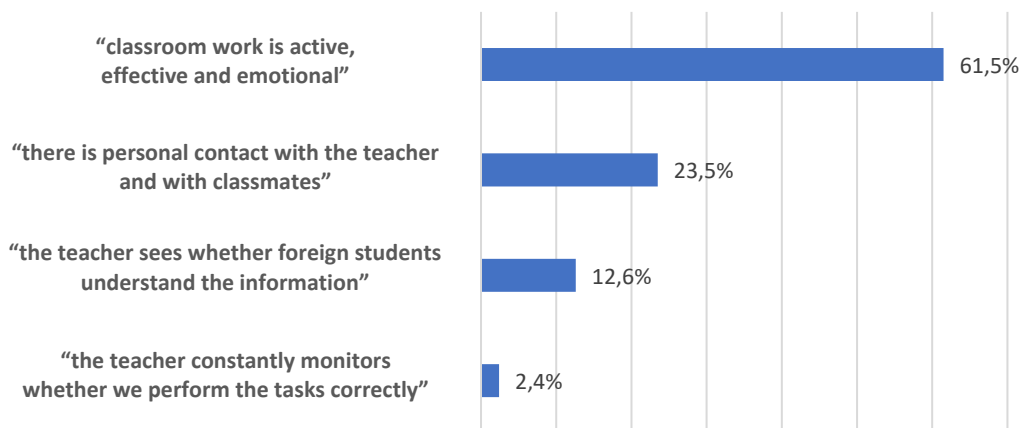


Figure 6. Foreign students' reasons for full-time training

The following arguments were given for distance learning: “it is possible to review the video recording of the lecture several times at a convenient time” (81.4%); “it is not necessary to spend time on traveling to the university” (2.6%); “it is possible to listen to the lecture in any place” (10.5%); “the teacher uses illustrative material (videos, photos, podcasts, etc.) and presentations that contain basic information on the topic” (4.5%); “there are more opportunities for feedback (chat questions)” (1%) (Figure 7).

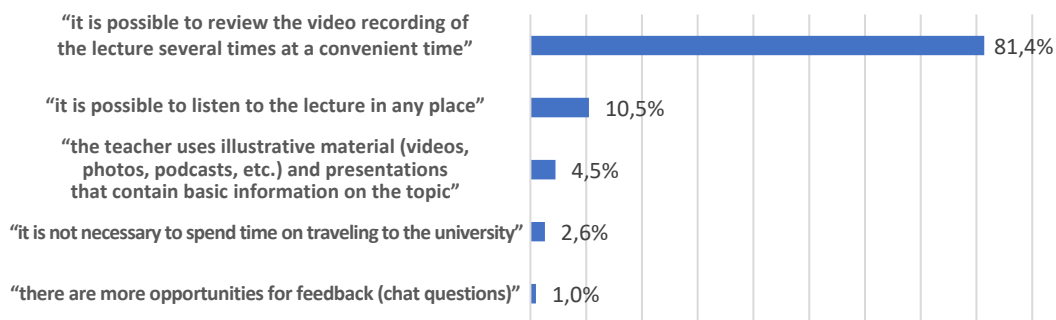


Figure 7. Foreign students' reasons for choosing online form of training

Since students' satisfaction with the certification system and forms of control on major subjects affects the quality of education, we asked the respondents to evaluate the system of certification in Russian universities in general. It positively assessed by 52% of respondents. Not fully satisfied with the evaluation strategies and forms are 36%. Negative ratings were given by 12 % of students (Figure 8).

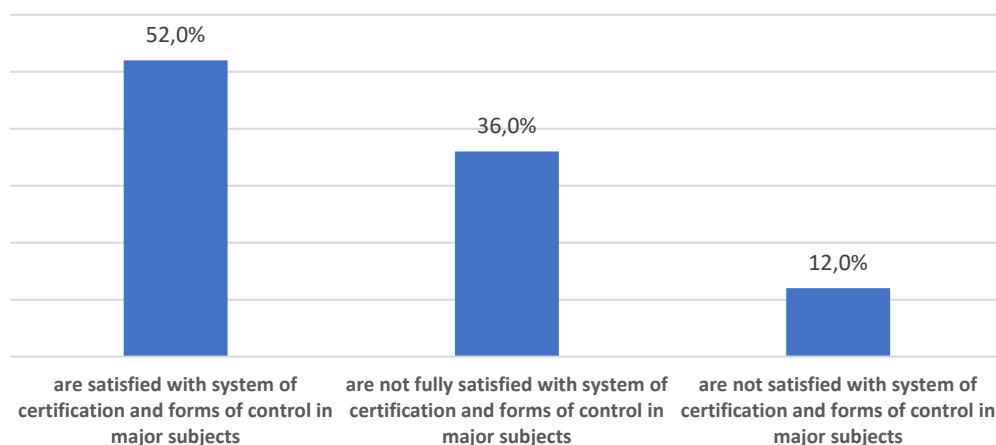


Figure 8. Level of students' satisfaction with system of certification and forms of control in major subjects

Testing was considered the best form of monitoring (36%), probably because of the widespread use of this form of control in most national academic systems.

Next come written control paper (29%), essay (14%), creative project (13%). The colloquium (8%) is considered the most inefficient form of control (Figure 9).

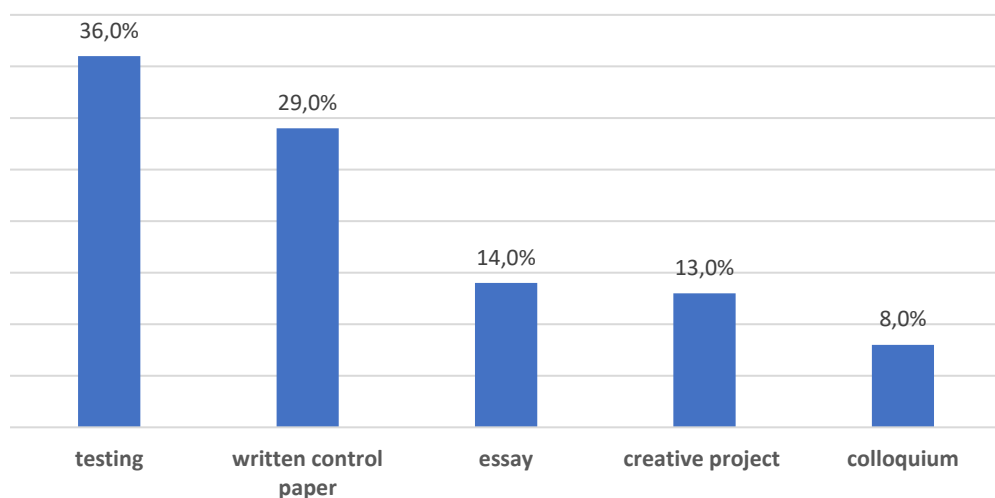


Figure 9. The most effective methods of control (students' opinion)

Problems of the first group identified during the monitoring, namely, a large amount of information in major subjects, incomprehensible explanation of the teaching material, the quality of speech of teachers of major subjects, can be solved by optimizing the existing system of foreign specialists training in Russian universities – choosing the optimal forms of training, strategies, methods and techniques of certification and control of students' educational achievements. In our opinion, the problems of material presentation at the lessons are due to the insufficient methodological training of teachers of major subjects. Most subject teachers know the scientific content of their subjects, but they cannot always convey this content to the recipient – a foreign student. It is also possible to solve these problems by means of the existing system of vocational education of foreigners – special training courses for teachers of major subjects working in multi-ethnic groups.

The problem factors of the second group, which the monitoring also identified, caused more concern. The data show (Figure 10) that more than half of the respondents (53.5%) indicated a general lack of preparation for the first year of a Russian university as a cause of educational difficulties. At the same time, 31.8% of foreigners cited the lack of proficiency in Russian as the main reason, while 21.7% cited the lack of training in major subjects. The respondents note that they are “bad at learning” major subjects and that is why they lack a positive dynamics in their development. Answered that “do not know the terms”, “do not understand the texts of lectures and textbooks on major subjects because of a large number of new

terms and unfamiliar words” 9.5% of respondents. It should be noted that, as shown above, most of the foreigners who took part in the monitoring took part finished or almost finished a full course at preparatory faculties and departments of higher educational institutions of the Russian Federation.

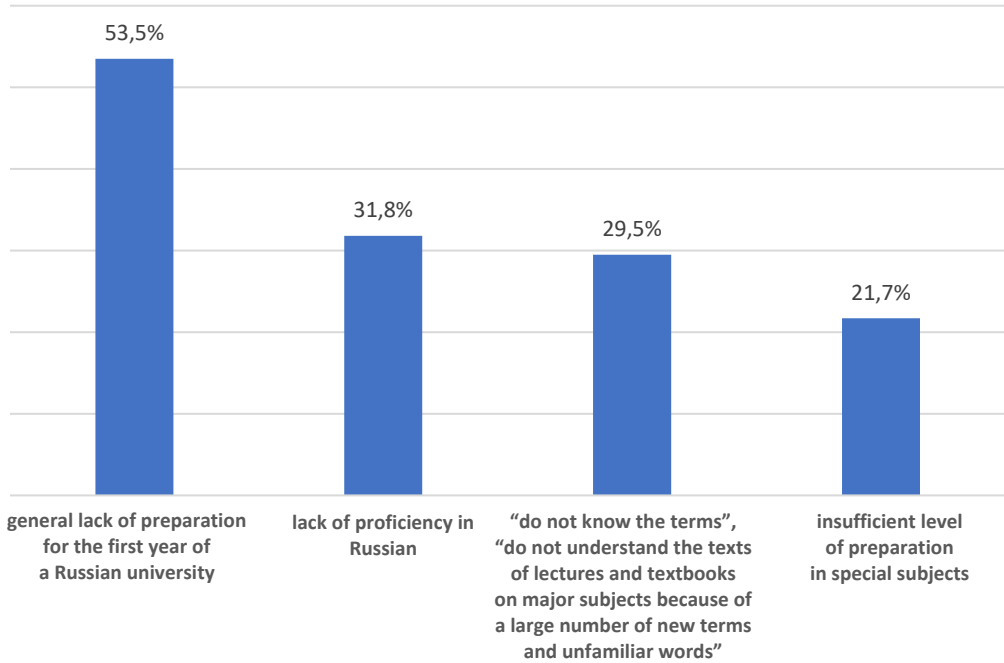


Figure 10. Problems connected with the general lack of readiness of foreign students for first-year studies

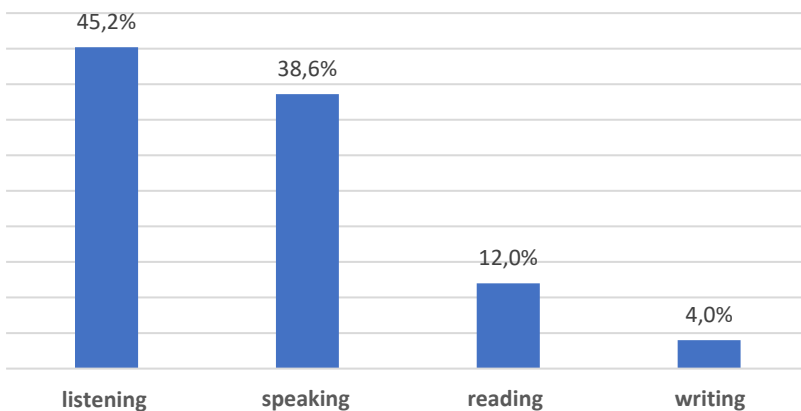


Figure 11. Types of speech activities and their level of difficulty for foreign students

As we see, the students consider the most significant cause of difficulties in their training is the insufficient level of knowledge of the academic Russian lan-

guage, i.e. the irregular skills of Russian-language communication in the educational and professional sphere. The data show that the most complicated type of speech activity for respondents is academic listening, i.e. perception and understanding of lectures on major subjects in Russian. Find it difficult to listen and understand lectures 45.2% of foreigners. The second most difficult type of speech activity is speaking: the ability to speak and answer the teacher’s questions at seminars (38.6%). Academic reading is the following in terms of the difficulty: reading, semantic analysis, etc. of textbooks and manuals in major subjects (12%). Academic writing (4%) is the least difficult for foreign students in the first year (Figure 11).

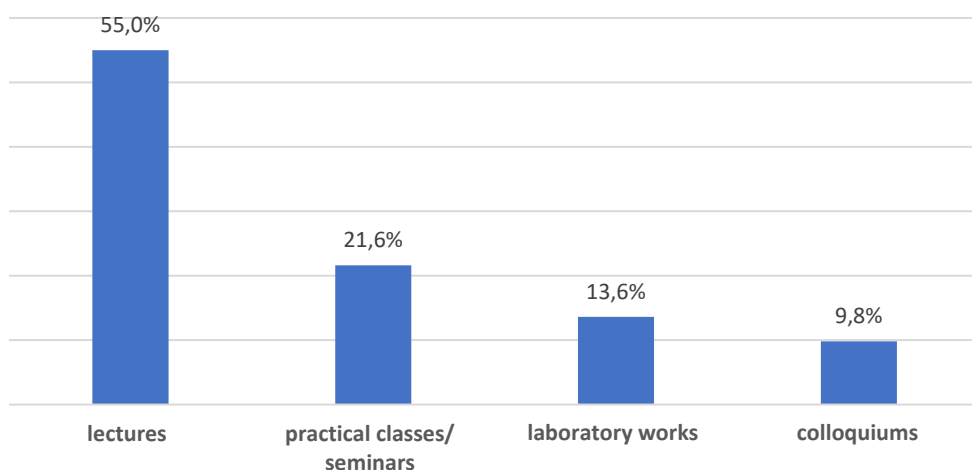


Figure 12. Types of lessons and their difficulty for foreign students

The second most important problem of this group for students of almost all specialties and directions was the low starting level of subject competence – lack of knowledge, skills, abilities necessary to start studying major subjects. Thus, future engineers, physicists, mathematicians indicated the lack of subject readiness to master mathematical disciplines (28,5%), engineering and architectural graphics (20,4%), computer technologies and programming (19%). Future doctors are not ready to study such basic academic subjects as anatomy (34.8%), chemistry (25%), biology (14.3%), physics (11%), biostatistics, bioelementology (7.7%). International students of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences indicated unpreparedness for political geography (33%), philosophy (32%), mathematics (14%). At the Faculty of Economics, similar results were obtained for such major subjects as microeconomics (29.4%), economic geography (20.1%), mathematics (18.4%), sociology (15.6%). Future lawyers are not ready to study the theory of state and

law (46.2%), economics (15.4%). Foreign students of the Institute of Ecology expressed the opinion that they have difficulties in mastering regional geocology (100%), mathematics (100 %). In general, 84.6 % of the respondents answered that they do not possess the starting level of subject competence sufficient for studying special academic subjects. According to the results of the study, the most difficult for students are lectures (more than 55% of foreigners do not understand the material), practical classes/seminars (21.6%), laboratory works (13.6%), colloquiums (9.8%) (Figure 12).

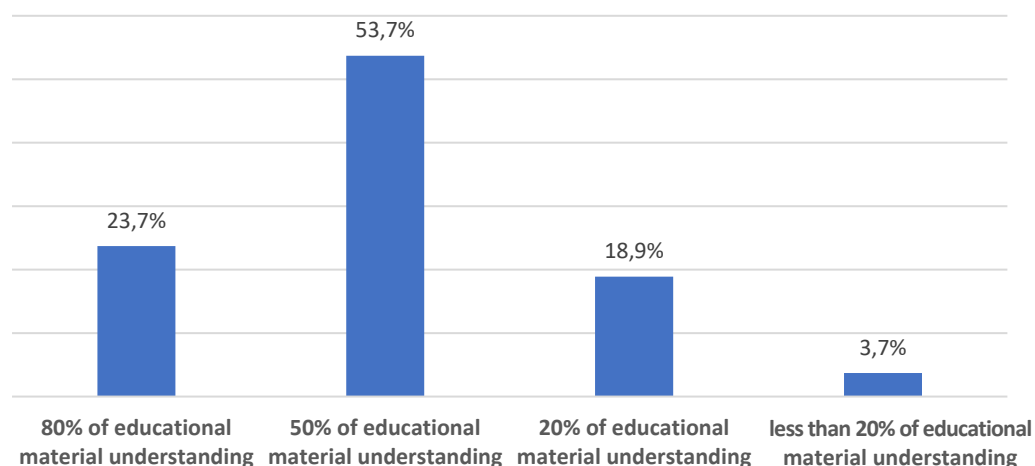


Figure 13. Foreign students' understanding of the educational material

As a result, the low level of communicative and subject competence leads to significant losses in the quality of education of foreign students. Our research shows that the maximum (80%) of educational material is understood by only 23.7% of students. Assimilate only 50% of information 53.7% of respondents, 20% of the material is assimilated by 18.9% of students. Less than 20% of the study material is understood by 3.7% of students (Figure 13).

Discussion

The above data indicate that the current system of teaching subjects and the Russian language to foreigners at the pre-university stage cannot help solve problems of Russian universities in training foreign specialists. This significantly reduces the level and quality of their professional knowledge, skills, abilities and significantly damages the reputation of Russian higher education at the international market of educational services. The facts show the need to modernize the existing

system of pre-university training of foreign specialists, to find new solutions for ensuring quality, intensive formation of their communicative and subject competences.

As noted above, it is the subject-linguistic integrated training that meets the objectives and specifics of professional and communicative training of foreigners, especially at the pre-university stage. This training should be intensive, immersive, qualitative, it will fulfil relevant tasks of academic communication in Russian universities.

The great methodological potential of subject-language integrated learning is provided by the following features:

- the CLIL model has a special – integrative – form of lessons, where equal attention is paid to both substantive (subject knowledge, skills, abilities) and formal (communicative-speech) aspects of academic discourse: the teacher teaches not only the content of the major academic subject, but also strategies, forms and means of representing this content in Russian;

- CLIL model lessons are organised by teachers who have specialized professional education (CLIL-pedagogues). They do not only know the scientific content of the major academic subject, but also have skills of presenting and adapting this content to the educational needs and the level of subject and communicative training of students in multi-ethnic student groups. A CLIL-pedagogue can be both a subject teacher who has mastered strategies and techniques of methodical interpretation of subject knowledge, semantization of terminological units and their inclusion in the individual speech of foreign students, and a teacher-philologist who has received additional training in the subject;

- at the CLIL model lessons, foreigners are taught Russian and subjects in a simultaneous manner, mastering Russian through the subject, and the subject through academic Russian (Bruton, 2011; Coyle et al., 2010; Dalton-Puffer et al., 2010; Ruíz de Zarobe, Jiménez Catalán, 2009). As noted by the founders of CLIL D. Coyle, P. Hood, D. Marsh: the essence of this methodological model is not mainly in teaching a subject in a foreign language, but in a special organization of learning, where the subject and the foreign language become equivalent learning objectives (Coyle et al., 2010: 3);

- teaching and methodological support for CLIL (teaching tools, control, etc.) is developed jointly by subject methodologists and Russian language specialists.

Based on the key features of CLIL, foreign scholars define it as learning where a subject is studied through a foreign language and vice versa (Promoting language learning..., 2004); simultaneous acquisition of language and another academic subject: a student uses language to learn and learns to use language (Gulaya, Romanova, 2016; Promoting language learning..., 2004; Van de Craen, 2006, 2014;

Van de Craen et al., 2007; Gajo, 2007; Coyle et al., 2010; Kay, 2010; Kelly, 2012, 2014, etc.).

In Russian methodological discourse, subject-language integrated learning is defined as teaching the content of the studied subject in a foreign language while learning the foreign language itself⁴; forms of using language as a means of learning based on principles of language immersion (Loktyshina, Saitimova, 2015: 325); complex, system-interrelated foreign language teaching, where professionally significant knowledge and skills are simultaneously formed in accordance with the future speciality of the student (Votintseva, 2012: 10); the formation of linguistic and communicative competence in a foreign language in the same subject context when general academic knowledge and skills are formed and developed (Krashe-ninnikova, 2013; Kolykhalova, 2018; Melekhina, 2021: 82; Kuznetsova, 2022: 5 and others.).

Based on the key characteristics of CLIL identified by scholars, our own pedagogical experience and research, we define subject-language integrated learning for foreign students as integrative, simultaneous and interrelated formation of communicative and subject competences of foreign citizens who are studying at Russian universities.

Following E.G. Azimov and A.N. Shchukin, we define the communicative competence of foreign students as the ability to solve communication problems by means of a foreign language, the ability to use the facts of language and speech to achieve communication goals (Azimov, Shchukin, 2009: 98). We define the subject competence of foreign students as a system of knowledge, skills and abilities in the field of major subjects.

Conclusion

Thus, our research has revealed a number of problems in teaching Russian language and subjects in Russian to foreign students. The problems are not solved in the existing system of education of foreigners in Russian universities. The most acute problem is the low level of language and subject training of foreign specialists at the pre-university stage. This is a serious obstacle to the qualitative mastering of specialized subjects and the very possibility of teaching foreigners in Russian higher educational institutions.

The analysis and methodological evaluation of the goals, principles, methods and technologies of subject-language integrated learning in this paper prove its great

⁴ Maltseva, E.Y. (2020). *Content language integrated learning: textbook* (p. 4). Samara: SamSU Publ. (In Russ.)

potential in overcoming and preventing the identified problems. The most important advantages of CLIL include the possibility of intensifying the learning process, which is of great importance in the conditions of short-term education: the subject content and the form of its linguistic representation are mastered by foreign students at the same time, within the framework of a single course, there is no unjustified “backloading” of time for studying the same educational material. Increasing effectiveness of foreign specialists education is also achieved with the help of innovative technologies of CLIL, which provides organization and assimilation of both language and subject learning material in accordance with the rules of its cognitive processing.

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Научная статья

Методический потенциал предметно-языкового интегрированного обучения иностраннх студентов в условиях современной образовательной среды

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Аннотация. В течение десятилетий Российская Федерация входит в десятку мировых лидеров по количеству иностранцев, изучающих специальность в организациях среднего и высшего профессионального образования. В этой связи качественная образовательная подготовка иностраннх студентов – одна из наиболее важных и актуальных задач российской педагогики. Вместе с тем существующая система не обеспечивает эффективное решение этой задачи: большой процент иностранцев-первокурсников ежегодно отчисляется вследствие невозможности освоить специальные предметы на русском языке. Цель исследования – установление проблем, препятствующих успешному обучению иностранцев на младших курсах российских вузов, а также разработка способов их преодоления и предупреждения. Для достижения поставленной цели проведены мониторинговые исследования с участием иностраннх студентов 1-го курса бакалавриата, специалитета и магистратуры Российского университета дружбы народов. Полученные данные свидетельствуют о необходимости модернизации системы обучения иностранцев как русскому языку, так и профильным учебным дисциплинам. Большим методическим потенциалом в повышении качества и эффективности существующей системы обладает

концепция предметно-языкового интегрированного обучения. В рамках исследования принципы и технологии этой концепции рассмотрены и методически интерпретированы применительно к задачам образовательной подготовки иностранных специалистов в вузах РФ. Полученные результаты вносят вклад в развитие теории и методики профессионально ориентированного обучения иностранцев русскому языку и специальным предметам на русском (неродном) языке, способствуют созданию условий для оптимизации образовательной подготовки иностранных студентов в российских вузах.

Ключевые слова: методика преподавания, русский язык как иностранный, профессионально ориентированное обучение, русский язык

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