

Teaching and Learning of Russian at the University of Guilan in Iran

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Abstract

This study examined the factors affecting the quality of teaching and learning in Russian language department at the University of Guilan in Iran. Questionnaires were distributed among 120 Russian students in the Faculty of Humanities. Also a semi-structured interview was conducted with 5 academic staff members to complete the information about the quality of teaching and learning. Results revealed that academic staff members frequently use modern instructional technologies and variety of teaching methods in their Russian language lessons. It was also found that students learn under harsh environment which is often rowdy congested and noisy. The main problems in the teaching and learning processes in Russian language department are the lack of books, newspapers, no group teaching and learning, shortage of supervision on the quality of teaching and learning processes, shortage of students' motivation, not enough research projects in the specific area like vocabulary store, not specific syllabus and inappropriate educational policy.

Keywords: teaching, learning, Russian, language

INTRODUCTION

Majority of the students who are admitted to the Universities in Iran have no ample opportunity to study Russian language in spite of cultural similarities with Russia and other countries which was called Soviet Union. Even all students admitted into the universities in Iran are encouraged to take few courses in the use of English, the content of which are grossly inadequate for the students to acquire requisite skills in effective use of language for communication and for the give and take of social experience. We can think about Russia language which in order to study Russian skills in the four language arts skills; namely: speaking, reading, listening and writing. Language is the tool of social interaction and we need effective language to function properly in the work place, social interaction and indeed for functional literacy. Fink (2008) found four fundamental tasks of teaching: knowledge of subject matter, designing learning experiences, interactive with students, course management

A rich and stimulating language environment during the early years and beyond is essential to the development of verbal and intellectual skills necessary for language learning. Malinowski, (1991), asserted that composition writing is a difficult skill to acquire and recommended therefore that teachers must use a variety of methods for teaching English language. Ellis and Omlison, (1980), recommended some basic skills to be taught to learners so that they can write essays proficiently. Such skills include spelling punctuation linguistic skills and convention of style. Reyner, et al (2001), ascertained that “many good teachers are adaptive rather than rigid in their approach to teaching children and only loosely base their instruction on a given methods”. There are odds against the Iranian students in learning Russian language. Trifonovitch (1981) indicated that a student is automatically placed at a disadvantage when he already has a language of his own and he is asked to learn another language.

With the poor performance of students and graduates in Russian language in Iran, educators' portents employers are worried and concerned. The problem therefore, is what factors are responsible for the general poor performance of Iran students in Russian as an important language. Gijbels, D and et.al (2005) in their research confirmed that students' approaches to learning are sensitive to the learning contexts, as well as students' age and gender. Also, the values for deep and surface learning approaches may be related to academic outcomes. Hamm and Robertson (2010) found that multimedia assessment enables the adoption of both deep and surface learning approaches.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Due to shortage of attention to the quality of teaching and learning and over consideration on grade and mark in higher education system particularly in foreign language, it is necessary to do something about the quality of teaching and learning. The main objectives of the research paper are: aware of the amount students and Academic staffs' motivation, amount of using educational instrument, the type of teachers' teaching methods and the students' learning methods. The following research questions have been considered in the study:

1. Do students and academic staffs have enough motivation for teaching and learning?
2. Do the teachers use educational instrument in Russian language properly?
3. Are the Russian language teaching methods active or passive?
4. Are the Russian student learning methods surface or deep?
5. Does the inside and outside class create some psychological and physical satisfaction?
6. Are there any significant differences between Russian language students with respect to gender, age, entrance academic year and average mark?

METHOD

Participants and Samples

The population of this study included Russian language students in faculty of Humanities. There are over 150 Russian students in the faculty. Participants were drawn from Russian students through a random sampling technique. The Russian language was stratified along the four entrance were randomly selected from each entrance making a total of 120 students.

Research design

This is essentially a survey research utilizing a questionnaire based on the Likert, type rating scale. The statistical tests used for the study were the mean and standard deviation. The means were used as statistical standard due to the conformity of standard deviation for all questionnaire items.

Since sections B and Cuff the questionnaire Likert scales comprise five response ratings of very frequently (5) frequently (4), occasionally (3), seldom (2), and never (1), respectively a theoretical mean value of 3.0 * was determined as a criterion to judge the means of the items in these sections of the questionnaire.

Instruments

The main instruments used for this study were a questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The researcher designed the questionnaire by generating a list of items which solicited students' responses on teaching strategies instructional resources/media used by the academic staff members and the teaching and learning environment. The items in the questionnaire were derived from literature and the researchers' experiences in the field. The range of data collection instruments employed increased the researchers' ability to examine the nature and frequency with certain variables occurred in the research setting. The specifics for each of the two data collection instruments used in the study are as follows:

Questionnaire: this instrument had four sections dealing with demographic items such as gender, age and etc instructional methods and resources/media used by the Russian language academic staff members frequently adopted for teaching Russian language and the class environment.

Interview: academic staff members were interviewed about classroom proceedings during administration of the questionnaire noting the features or characteristics of the learning environment.

The validity of the instrument was ascertained by presenting the questionnaire to some experts in behavioural sciences. The experts made some observations and modifications on the items. The section on instructional resources had 17 items; the section on

teaching techniques had 10 items, while the section on learning environment also had 10 items. There were 27 items in the questionnaire. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was calculated by using coronach alpha and it was found to be 0.85.

Procedure

All the 120 students randomly selected for the study were given the questionnaire to examine their experiences with the quality of the teaching and learning of Russian language as well as the conduciveness of their class environment to effective learning. All 120 of the questionnaire were returned properly filled, thus representing 80% return rate.

In addition to the questionnaire, semi-structured interview we also used as instrument for data collection from academic staff members in Russian language. This was done to complete of answers given by students in the questionnaire.

RESULT

In the research question one: Do students and academic staffs have enough motivation for teaching and learning?, the results showed that *The students considered for students' motivation, 69% low motivation and academic motivation 70% high motivation.* In the research question two "Do the academic use educational instrument in Russian language properly?" The students considered for using educational instrument 73% with no satisfaction. In the research question three, "Is the Russian language teaching methods active or passive?", The students considered for active teaching methods 61% agreement. In the research question four, "Is the Russian student teaching methods surface or deep?", The students considered for deep learning methods 66% with no agreement. In the research question five, "Does the inside and outside class satisfy psychologically and physically? The students considered inside class 70% agreement and outside class 56% with no agreement. In the research question six, "Are there any differences between students about the teaching and learning quality with respect to gender, age, entrance academic year and average of the marks.

Table 1: Teaching and Learning Quality Split on Gender

Analysis of Variance

Source	D.F	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F
Between	1	1.2762	1.27	4.43*
Within	119	47.9951	.28	
Total	120	49.27113		

Male with Female D.F=119 (P<0.035)*

*Significant P<0.05

In bases on the above table, there are no differences between students split on gender. It means they think about teaching and learning quality in Russian language in the same as each other.

Table 2: Teaching and Learning Quality Split on age

Analysis of Variance

Source	D.F	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F
Between	1	1.2616	1.26	4.50*
Within	119	48.0096	.28	
Total	120	49.2713		

Under 20-24 With 24-Up D.F=120 (P<0.036)*

*Significant P<0.05

Table 2 shows that there are no differences between students split on age. It means they think about teaching and learning quality in Russian language in the same as each other.

Table 3: Teaching and Learning Quality Split on academic year entrance

Analysis of Variance

Source	D.F	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F
Between	1	1.6581	1.65	6.34*
Within	119	45.9803	.26	
Total	120	47.6385		

85-86 with 87-88 D.F=120 (P<0.013)*

*Significant P<0.05

Table 4 shows that, there are no differences between students split on academic year entrance. It means they think about teaching and learning quality in Russian language in the same as each other.

Table 4: Teaching and Learning Quality Split on academic average

Analysis of Variance

Source	D.F	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F
Between	1	1.6581	1.75	6.25*
Within	119	45.9803	.28	
Total	120	47.6385		

Under-15 With 15-Up D.F=120 (P<0.014)*

*Significant P<0.05

Table 4 shows that there are no differences between students split on academic average. It means they think about teaching and learning quality in Russian language in the same as each other.

DISCUSSION

Use of instructional resources/media

This study has revealed the dominance of textbooks dictionaries, whiteboards and workbooks in the teaching of Russian language in classes. Modern media such as audio and video tapes, language laboratories programmed texts flash cards, computers, magazines and newspapers are rarely used. These findings agree with Kolawole (1998) who found that the teaching of English language is bedevilled with many problems such as inadequate period of teaching, method of teaching and lack of adequate and useful resources. What this means is that Russian academic staffs in University of Guilan are not altering their instructional practices in spite of the coming of the new instructional technologies. Traditionally Russian academic staffs have depended on textbooks and the whiteboards as media for disseminating knowledge in the classroom. With the coming of new instructional technologies Galliher, et al (1995) asserted that teachers' roles are beginning to change. It means the department should think about more changes on teaching and learning process.

Use of teaching and learning techniques

Deep learning implies the demonstration of higher order thinking skills such as synthesis and evaluation, and a personal commitment to learn the material, not merely learning for the sake of a passing grade (Ramsden, 2003). Surface learning, on the other hand, is associated more with rote learning and the desire to earn a passing grade (Draper, 2009). Students who use a surface learning strategy are trying to avoid failure with the minimum amount of effort and involvement (Cano, 2007). Draper (2009) expanded upon this idea by concluding that shallow learners understand the material correctly, but simply do not possess the connections between concepts that deep learners do. Deep learners can transfer the learned concepts to a variety of situations thereby creating a denser matrix of connections within their knowledge and understanding. Therefore, the student's motive is integral to whether he or she engages in deep or surface learning strategies.

Having attention to the improvement of quality in learning requires the existence of a clear definition from quality of learning. Joyce, et al (2005) believe that the quality of learning can be defined as a change in activities and pervasive interactions and as a result involving with a learning experience will be considered. Gibbs (1992) defines the quality in a format of phrases such as growth of mental and intellectual Capabilities, growth in judgment strength, consolidating the case solving skills, the ability of considering matter's inner relations and understanding subjects in a vast prospect. These objectives must help to improve research morality, developing creative methods,

logical judgment, criticizing point of view and self-consciousness in learners so by considering these instances a comparative level of assurance about realizing them is resulted. Of course, only considering the definition of quality doesn't assure learning since despite the definition of quality was proposed as an ambiguous problem in analyzing and reviewing in educational institutes, but practically this factor isn't that determinant. It sounds like that since through studying general methods of learning we can measure quality of learning's instances in a better way and more practical way, paying more attention to general methods of learning can certainly picture the position in learning.

Galliher, et al. (1995) states that teachers must assume their role similar to "resource brokers". The implication of this is that academic staffs should become familiar with a variety of instructional delivery methods rather than rely on one "best way". The findings in this study run contrary to the above assertion as the Russian language academic staffs in Guilan University still depend heavily on the traditional lecture method in Russian lessons. While the intensive use of prescribed textbooks and the use of lecture method in delivering Russian lessons are prevalent the debate and group methods of teaching are occasionally used.

In addition to the use of the teaching method, Cleve (1992) and Oluikpe (1979) advocated the use of method such as guided controlled and free writing techniques in essay writing. The goal of controlled expression is to instil in the learner the facilities needed to produce clear piece of composition free from all grammatical errors. This is based on the premise that the use of language is the manipulation of fixed patterns which are learnt by imitation and not until these have been learnt that originality occur in their writing endeavours.

The technique advocated here include presenting academic staffs model essays reading other materials such as journals novels and magazines and allowing students free expression so that their language experience can be enriched.

The physical and psychological environment of the class

This study has showed the situation of inside the class not so bad but the outside has some problems. Our interview with academic staff members revealed the following environmental deficiencies:

- (a) Many classes are located in areas where there is a busy movement and activities of many people. It was emphasised that many students used the classes' premises as short cut to their destinations. Many students often move through the paths and speak with each other loudly.
- (b) There are not enough textbooks in many courses
- (c) There is no video projection in the classes (other than laboratories).
- (d) Some of Russian language academic staffs have individual methods for their teaching

- (e) The teaching methods are more active.
- (f) The learning methods are surface more than deep.

CONCLUSION

The Russian language in Guilan University is far behind time in offering multiple pathways to the teaching and learning Russian as an important language. Little wonder that the system has been witnessing steady decline with the percentage of students who failed Russian language examinations fluctuating between 55% and 75% in the past ten years (Olaboopo, 1998). The effect of this is that students are already at disadvantage due to poor background and preparation in language education.

Russian language should be provided with adequate and a variety of instructional media. If academic staffs are to assume new roles and use new technology supported instructional tools, they should become familiar with a variety of instructional delivery methods rather than relying on textbooks green or whiteboard and teaching methods. Technologies such as audio and video recordings language laboratories and computer can be more effective teaching tools for Russian language lessons as they offer authentic learning experience when interwoven with existing curriculum.

We are convinced that the high potential for enhanced learning through the provision of conducive learning environment can be attained in classes. It is strongly recommended that the learning environment should be given priority attention by state, university and faculty authorities so that students can learn well.

Both students and academics should try to create the specific situation for better intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, better inside and outside physical and psychological atmospheres and also have active and deep methods in their learning and teaching. Academics should try to have proper textbooks in Russian language and better using of educational instruments.

Sadeghi, and Sadeghi (2012) found that based on research results on deep and surface, biased learners increasingly which became surface learners did worse compare with deep learners. On the other hand, surface students of low ability seem to be motivated to study as they are given more chances to secure a pass. Also, Sadeghi and et al (2012) in the other research found that six areas were named ASM' characteristics, university student characteristics, academic activities, teaching process, learning process and classroom atmospheres affected on the quality of teaching and learning. In the other research, Sadeghi and Sadeghi (2013) found that academic staff members emphasized on the importance of deep learning and its necessity in the teaching and learning process.

The researchers suggest some implementation to the department of Russian Language and Faculty of Humanities in University of Guilan, Iran such as using more educational instrument, using active teaching methods, pay more attention on deep learning and consider on psychological and physical situation. These implementations can create atmosphere for quality of teaching and learning. The limitations of the research were

lack of enough time, concentration just on Russian language academic staff and students. We suggest to do such research to other foreign language departments such as Arab, English and Persian languages departments and also compare the among all Humanities departments for the next related researches.

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