И. В. БОРИСОВА, Н. Н. БАЛАБАС

Использование видеоматериалов как средство повышения эффективности языковой подготовки обучающихся на этапе аспирантуры

Цифровизация общества формирует виртуальные приоритеты у молодёжи и тем самым выдвигает новые требования к образованию. На всех ступенях высшего образования эффективность учебного процесса зависит, в первую очередь, от того, насколько быстро и грамотно преподаватель реагирует на вызовы информационно-коммуникационной среды. Целью данного исследования являются поиски путей оптимизации учебно-воспитательного процесса на занятиях по дисциплине «Иностранный язык» в аспирантуре. Для достижения поставленной цели были использованы следующие методы: анализ литературы отечественных и зарубежных авторов; локальный педагогический эксперимент; непосредственное и опосредованное наблюдение; сравнение, систематизация и обобщение статистических данных. По результатам исследования были сделаны выводы о том, что систематическое использование видеофрагментов на аудиторных занятиях способствует повышению мотивации обучающихся, обогащению их словарного запаса, расширению общенаучного и профессионального кругозора, преодолению научного провинциализма. В качестве перспективного направления выделяется актуализация учебных пособий за счёт использования современного виртуального контента, что, в конечном итоге, при создании соответствующих условий для преподавателя и студентов, переключит внимание обеих сторон с элементарной подготовки обучающегося к сдаче кандидатского экзамена на превращение его в полноценного коммуниканта интернационального научного сообщества. Даются конкретные рекомендации специалистам-практикам на основании авторских разработок.

Ключевые слова: цифровизация общества, виртуальные приоритеты, аспирантура, иностранный язык, актуализация учебных пособий, видеоматериалы, профессиональная коммуникация

Ссылка для цитирования:

Борисова И. В., Балабас Н. Н. Использование видеоматериалов как средство повышения эффективности языковой подготовки обучающихся на этапе аспирантуры // Перспективы науки и образования. 2019. № 5 (41). С. 400-411. doi: 10.32744/pse.2019.5.28

I. V. BORISOVA, N. N. BALABAS

Using video materials as a means of increasing students' language training efficiency at the post-graduate level

Society digitalization highlights the youth's virtual priorities and puts forward new claims on education. At all higher education levels, the teaching-learning process efficiency primarily depends on a teacher's quick and correct response on information and communication environment challenges. The aim of this research is to find the ways of educational process optimization at studying the subject "Foreign Language" in post-graduate school. To reach this aim the authors used the following methods: analyzing domestic and foreign literature; carrying out a local pedagogical experiment; making direct and indirect observations; comparing, summarizing and classifying statistical data obtained. Resting upon the research results, they drew the conclusions that using video fragments in class systematically contributed to increasing students' motivation, enriching their vocabulary, widening their professional outlook, overcoming their scientific provincialism. As a perspective guideline one may consider updating the existing textbooks through using the latest virtual content, which, in the long run, under favourable conditions created for both teachers and students, will switch over both sides' attention from preparing students for their Candidate's examination to turning them into meaningful communicants of the international scientific community. The authors also give some useful recommendations to practical specialists based on their own experience.

Key words: society digitalization, virtual priorities, post-graduate school, foreign language, textbook upgrading, video materials, professional communication

For Reference:

Borisova, I. V., & Balabas, N. N. (2019). Using video materials as a means of increasing students' language training efficiency at the post-graduate level. *Perspektiv nauki i obrazovania – Perspectives of Science and Education*, 41 (5), 400-411. doi: 10.32744/pse.2019.5.28

Introduction

Education is a human sphere that clearly reflects all the changes the society undergoes. Such state of affairs demands that a teacher should, on the one hand, constantly revise the educational content of the subject taught and, on the other hand, improve timely the methodical aspect of the process. In the modern world, with its rapid technological advances, pedagogical researchers face the problem of making education relevant to positive evolutionary trends retaining the basic moral values that provide healthy society's sustainability.

We completely share the view that "revealing, systematizing and formulating factors and trends of higher school innovational development are an urgent scientific problem that needs articulating and investigating" [9, p. 214-215]. The key trend making the necessity of revising educational approaches evident is society digitalization. Technical improvements, widely spread computers and various mobile devices providing a 24/7 Internet access, complex software – all these prerequisites create specific "game rules". It is absolutely obvious that "digital communication has become an essential 21st century skill for students who are exposed to an increasingly globalized and multicultural world where advances in technology are connecting them to different cultures with an ease that was unfamiliar in past centuries" [8, p. 92].

Undoubtedly, such situation influences the way of students' perceiving information and their entire mindset. The very idea of a teacher's exceptionality as a person possessing knowledge has become history. A teacher is no longer a source of the latest and most precise information for a student. All that is claimed by a teacher in class can be immediately verified and, as a result, accepted or rejected. However, one could hardly believe that this new trend fully devalues teacher's profession. As it was noted before, "knowledge is information that has been morally evaluated, in other words, 'drained through one's head and soul'. That is the essence of teacher's profession: to drain the information, cut off the harmful and poisonous for young brain and select the interesting, necessary and noble. That is also the essence of bringing up <...>. Bringing up is a process of mutually gaining new ideas in the process mastering a subject. It is a soul labour of people connected by common activity" [4, p. 92].

Taking into consideration all mentioned above, one should rather treat the situation observed in today's education as a challenge that makes a teacher look for new, more efficient methods, build adequate relationship with students in order not only to raise their interest in the subject, but also to demonstrate to them a full diversity of learning approaches that can be used in accordance with their individual traits and preferences. That is the reason why we, after McGrail, are apt to believe that "pedagogy should be before technology, rather that technology before pedagogy" [14, p. 81].

Russia's signing the Bologna Declaration in 2003 became a starting point for reforming the higher education system with a view of its aligning with the European Educational Standards. Such changes grew urgent because of the processes on educational integration and internationalization that imply mobility, free travel, internships and academic exchanges, taking part in international professional conferences, symposia and seminars.

It is known that after passing to the Bologna system, higher education in Russia was divided into three levels: Bachelor, Master, post-graduate. Rapid technological development, excessive information flow intensity and knowledge outdated impose special demands

on a modern specialist. Consequently, nowadays it is impossible to get education only at one level, “once and for ever”. It is necessary to constantly enrich and update the received knowledge putting a special emphasis on the professional aspect, i.e. is not to merely follow the direction of “life-long education”, but switch over to its specified variant: “professional life-long education”.

It should be stated that at all higher education levels, teachers face the necessity of reforming their approaches to work in order to meet growing demands of the public, but the aim of this particular research is to reveal the ways of increasing the efficiency of organizing educational process at its third, post-graduate, level. It is obvious that post-graduates’ studying the subject “Foreign Language” presupposes strict succession of the educational process and requires “improving and developing the language knowledge and skills received by the students while their studying at Bachelor and Master levels, which is intended to make their communicative competence level higher” [1, p. 179]. In accordance with the demands of practically all versions of The Work Programme of the subject “Foreign Language” for post-graduates, on completing the course, students are to retell orally the content of the read text, to be able to make reports on their research topic in a foreign language, to comprehend the professionally oriented foreign speech and to respond to it adequately, to be able to answer questions and make a conversation in the sphere of their professional interests, to describe their research activity.

However, in spite of keeping the basic requirements mentioned above untouched, the latest generation of the Work Programmes of the subject “Foreign Language” for post-graduates exposes the communicative aspect priority in training, i.e. shifts the emphasis from working with a scientific text to being able to participate in a communication act with foreign colleagues. And the ultimate goal of communication-oriented training becomes “using a foreign language most efficiently in the native environment rather than in some contexts created under a teacher’s supervision” [17, p. 110].

Thus, the **object** of our research is organizing foreign language classes at the post-graduate level and its **subject** is using video materials as a means of increasing this process efficiency through students’ growing motivation.

The **topicality** of the research is proved by the above revealed trends of the modern digital society that require urgent revision of the higher education process organization, both in the form and in the content, taking into consideration the peculiarities of modern students’ audience and their virtual priorities.

The **novelty** of the research can be seen in the fact that the authors, on their long-term experience of teaching foreign languages (English, German, French) at all higher education levels, not only theoretically prove the need for changes, but also give some helpful recommendations to practical educators both in selecting the necessary academic materials at the post-graduate level and in its methodical presentation in class, supporting their conclusions validity by diagrammatic statistical data.

Materials and methods

In accordance with the principle of the applied methods being adequate to the paper subject matter, the following methods were used:

- analyzing domestic and foreign scientific and pedagogical literature on the topic investigated;

- local pedagogical experiment, its element being a students' contact survey;
- observing directly and indirectly the experiment results carried out in a discrete format;
- comparing, summarizing and classifying the statistical data obtained during the investigation.

The authors have thoroughly analyzed the textbooks, instructional and methodical aids used now in post-graduates' preparing for a Foreign Language Candidate's examination that can be considered the most representative ones in content and methodical aspects. The most famous textbooks that are popular with practical teachers today seem to be the following ones:

- "Learn to read science. The English course for post-graduates" developed by the team of authors under N.I. Shakhova's guidance [12],
- "English for post-graduates and competitors for a scientific degree" by S.I. Garagulya [7],
- "English for Master students and post-graduates of University natural faculties" by O.I. Safronenko et al. [19],
- "English for post-graduates" by Ye.I. Belyakova [3] (the English language);
- "German for post-graduates" by Ye.V. Sinkina [22] (the German language);
- "Foreign language for post-graduates" by L.V. Putilina [18] (the French language).

Not trying to belittle these works advantages, one should remark that their volume (reaching 360 pages) does not allow to use them perfectly in training non-linguistic post-graduates. Moreover, these textbooks lack digital appendices containing audio and video materials that are so urgent for mastering the subject efficiently within the short time determined by the curriculum. Exactly for this reason foreign language teachers working with post-graduates prefer designing their own instructional aids with the view of the following factors: students' knowledge level; students' major; the number of academic hours intended for completing the language course; material and technical provision of the teaching-learning process; the facilities for distant communication with students, etc. We also think such individual and applied approach to be the most rational and valid at the modern stage, and in this context, we would like to mention the following instructional aids as the most vivid examples:

- "English for post-graduates" by the team of the authors working in Orenburg State University [6],
- "English for post-graduates and competitors" by I.V. Balitskaya (Sakhalin State University) [2],
- "English for post-graduates and competitors" by S.Yu. Dmitriyeva (Penza State Agrarian University) [5],
- "The instructional aid on preparing post-graduates for passing the English Candidate's examination" by the team of the authors working in The Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation [10],
- "The instructional and methodical aid for passing the foreign language Candidate's minimum" by I.V. Lazaryeva (Moscow State Pedagogical University) [11],
- "The instructional aid for post-graduates and competitors" by the team of the authors working in Stavropol State Pedagogical Institute [13],
- "Postgraduate education and research: Instructional aid for post-graduates. The English language" by O.M. Mutovkina (Moscow State Regional University) [15],
- "French for post-graduates of Humanities faculties" by O.B. Polyanchuk (Voronezh State University) [16].

It is necessary to underline the fact that in the digital age, with its continuous information flow, the textbook content is growing out-of-date very quickly and, consequently, requires constant upgrade. This “flaw” could be eliminated through using video materials that are in free Internet access and whose base is refreshed practically every day. There is no doubt that it would be much cheaper to use them than yearly re-edit printed textbook versions with the revised content.

Research results

The presented results are based on analyzing the data obtained while the authors’ working with post-graduates of Moscow City University. In line with The Work Programme of the subject “Foreign Language”, post-graduates’ preparing for their Candidate’s examination takes 108 hours of the total time budget (36 hours go to classwork, 72 hours go to independent work). As we can see, the amount of time intended for classwork is abnormally little, so the process of face-to-face interaction between a teacher and students should become extremely intensive and fruitful. It seems to be reasonable to use the functional approach to selecting and presenting academic material and to enjoy the advantages of the particular academic situation that is considered not only as a means of speech stimulation, but also as an essential condition for speech skills development.

Let us consider in more detail the process of teacher-student interaction at the post-graduate level. Traditionally, foreign language training at Moscow City University includes the following class activities: reading and translating special-purpose literature; doing lexical and grammatical exercises; abstracting and summarizing texts; oral practice (making up dialogues and monologues about one’s own research work); others. But in the 2018/19 academic year we added such activity as watching and discussing video fragments regularly, to be more precise, at each lesson (see Figure 1). This was expected to create “the effect of diving” into the native environment on the comfortable emotional background in an academic group, to facilitate increasing students’ motivation and their overcoming psychological barriers in a communication process. Such approach, in combination with interactive activities whose usage could be impossible without modern multimedia technologies (situational dialogues and polylogues, discussions, cases, role plays), was to contribute to mastering the compulsory academic material within the strict schedule.

Figure 1 Types of activities in post-graduate class at Moscow City University

The video materials used by us in post-graduates' language training may be conventionally divided into three categories:

- 1) improving linguistic skills (vocabulary, grammar, style);
- 2) acquainting with the life style and learning environment abroad;
- 3) widening students' scientific and professional outlook (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 Categories of video fragments

In face-to-face classwork, more attention was paid to the second and third categories, a teacher recommending video fragments improving students' linguistic skills (or filling their knowledge gaps) for independent work. It is quite logical because post-graduates are always extremely different in their knowledge level and each of them needs an individual approach, which often hinders group work in class.

It is apparent that upgrading the existing instructional aids via demonstrating video fragments implies teacher's hard and intensive work on preparing for each lesson. It is rather time-consuming and also takes a lot of concentration and scrupulousness because it is necessary for a teacher to:

- watch the video fragment several times;
- divide the fragment into logical parts;
- select from each part the essential vocabulary (and distribute it into general and professional segments)
- design the tasks that will be carried out before, while and after each fragment watching;
- make up final questions that would help students realize the relevance of the matters touched upon in the video fragment to their own scientific interests, reveal the novelty of the information perceived and its importance for undertaking their original research.

It is necessary to stress the fact that the fragment duration may vary depending on the number of activities exercised at the lesson, students' knowledge level, linguistic difficulties of the fragment (unfamiliar words, speaker's accent, lack of paralinguistic communication means, poor record quality) and other tangible factors. But we came to the conclusion that the optimal fragment duration should be from 3 to 15 minutes. If necessary, the fragment should be cut into some logical parts and they are dealt with at the successive lessons (or the rest of material is given for independent study).

Let us share our experience of working with video fragments (in English, German and French) in class. The first fragment is devoted to peculiarities of studying and conducting research at British Universities and lasts for 6 minutes 54 seconds [24]. It is recommended for watching at the beginning of the course as it provides quite general information and does not contain any sophisticated special-purpose terminology.

Before watching, students are to exchange their opinions on the following statement, basing on their own views and experience: Studying and undertaking research in the UK is ... than in Russia. a) more expensive, b) more difficult, c) more effective. The fragment is logically divided into three parts (00:00-00:39, 00:40-03:51. 03:52-06:54). While watching, it is necessary to find answers to the following questions:

1st part: What country is the speaker from? What is the title of her first e-book? What is its genre?

2nd part: What are three positive things about UK Universities?

3rd part: What are three negative things about UK Universities?

After watching, it is recommended to return to the statement discussed at the initial stage and correct one's ideas with a view of the information obtained, using the speaker's vocabulary. While watching the fragment students are strongly advised to make notes for using them later at home by watching the fragment once (twice or more times) again in order to go in detail and learn useful lexical units by heart.

In German class, studying the topic "Participation in Conferences, Congresses and Symposia" it would be useful to demonstrate the video fragment "Warum ist Forschungsarbeit in der Neurologie so wichtig, Frau Prof. Klein?" devoted to the Neurology congress and lasting for 3 minutes and 34 seconds [25].

Before watching, students get handouts containing the lexical minimum to the fragment, as well as a number of problem questions. They study the unknown words pronunciation and make up their own examples with the key lexical units. The comparatively small number of learners in German groups (4-5 people) makes it possible to use effectively the individual instruction principle that gives an opportunity to contact personally with each student.

While watching, it is necessary to find answers to the following questions on the fragment content:

1. Was ist Neurologie?
2. Wer kann an diesem Kongress teilnehmen?
3. Wie kann man die Probleme der Neurologie lösen?

After watching, the following points are discussed:

1. Warum ist Forschungsarbeit in der Neurologie so wichtig?
2. Welche Rolle spielen solche Forschungen für die Menschheit?

A teacher sends a group the hyperlinks to these episodes either before or after the lesson depending on specific instructional tasks.

Introducing the topic "Writing a Scientific Paper" a French teacher could suggest that students should watch the video fragment «4 points pour publier un maximum d'articles scientifiques» lasting for 6 minutes 32 seconds [26].

At the initial stage, post-graduates also get cards with questions. The first question about the aims of publishing scientific papers is to be answered before watching the fragment. While watching, it is needed to focus attention on the following issues:

1. Quelles sont les raisons pour publier des articles scientifiques?
2. Quelle est la raison principale?
3. Pourquoi le docteur doit-il avoir son dossier scientifique ?

At the end, each student speculates on the speaker's opinion comprehended from the fragment. Then a teacher gives students the home task: to watch the fragment once again, put down and learn by heart all the unknown words and word combinations, making emphasis on general scientific and special-purpose vocabulary.

On completing the course of preparing for the Candidate's examination in the 2018/19 academic year, post-graduates were offered a written survey (112 respondents were officially registered). The results were as follows (taking into consideration the fact that most respondents made several choices):

A foreign language teacher's using video materials in class

- a) raised my motivation to attend classes – 85%,
- b) made lessons more efficient – 65%,
- c) enriched my vocabulary – 52%,
- d) widened my views on studying and conducting research abroad – 35%,
- e) allowed me to get acquainted with foreign scientific achievements in my field – 29%,
- f) increased the teacher's authority – 83%,
- g) had no influence at all – 0% (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 The results of using video materials in post-graduate classes

The discussion of the results

The results obtained in the course of investigation provide the evidence for claiming that thanks to a teacher's using video fragments in class systematically, students are able to:

- increase their motivation to attend classes and study a foreign language more conscientiously;
- noticeably enlarge their vocabulary with both "live" general words and (which is more valuable at this level) with modern professional terminology necessary for writing their theses, as well as working with texts at their Candidate's examination;
- get acquainted with the latest scientific achievements in their fields abroad, as well as methodological traditions of different research schools;
- compare Russian and foreign scientists' views on the problems reflected in their Candidate's theses;

- strengthen their scientific stances with new ideas by getting in touch with the research undertaken in other countries;
- become more competitive in participating in international research projects and publishing research results in foreign journals;
- overcome their scientific provincialism and lay the foundations for their future “scientific and research mobility” that implies the idea of “the ability of and readiness for gaining experience of research activity in the unified scientific and educational environment” [20, p. 562].

Conclusion

In the process of our research, we came to the conclusion that there existed a necessity of introducing the following urgent changes into planning and organizing educational activity by studying foreign languages at the post-graduate level:

1) Carrying out continuous upgrading of the applied textbooks, instructional and methodical aids through systematically using in a teaching-learning process academic materials available in free Internet access (video fragments explaining modern trends in lexical and grammatical aspects, lectures delivered by scientists of leading foreign Universities, reports of foreign scientists who are recognized authorities in specific professional fields, etc.).

2) Shifting emphasis from a purely tactical direction (preparing for passing a Candidate’s examination) to a more strategic goal (getting an access to foreign innovations in the specific scientific and professional sphere).

3) Increasing young scientists’ level of foreign language knowledge up to the mark that will allow them in future to do without “scientific communicators” who are “mediators between scientists and different ‘consumers’ and ‘customers’ of scientific information” [21, p. 117].

4) Revising a University teacher’s individual load in order to increase the number of hours intended for his or her preparing for classes and selecting materials for students’ independent work, as well as for communicating with students virtually.

5) Providing foreign language teachers an opportunity to have training at overseas Universities in order, first, to improve and “modernize” their language and, second, to master the advanced teaching methods successfully applied abroad.

6) Equipping classrooms for training post-graduates with the latest technology enjoying uninterrupted Internet connection, and providing, in case of emergency, an instantaneous contact with technical support staff for troubleshooting.

In conclusion, we would like to recommend our colleagues some helpful hyperlinks to video materials that turned out to be most interesting and contributive for upgrading textbooks and, as a consequence, for increasing students’ motivation and raising teachers’ work efficiency [27-47].

We hope that our experience will not only be of great value for foreign language teachers, but also inspire them to conduct further research in this field reflecting ever improving information and communication technology and their students’ changing priorities. As it was justly stated by Yong Zhao, “Technology capacities need to be translated into pedagogical solutions and realized in the forms of curriculum and content for language learners” [23, p. 22].

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Информация об авторах
Борисова Инна Владимировна
(Россия, Москва)

Доцент, кандидат филологических наук, доцент
Департамента языковой подготовки
Финансовый университет при Правительстве
Российской Федерации
E-mail: ivb66@yandex.ru
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5027-6484

Балабас Наталья Николаевна
(Россия, Москва)
Доцент, кандидат филологических наук
Доцент кафедры теории и практики иностранных
языков
Институт иностранных языков
Российский университет дружбы народов
E-mail: balnani@mail.ru
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2572-5684

Information about the authors
Inna V. Borisova
(Russia, Moscow)

Associate Professor, PhD in Philology, Associate
Professor of the Department of Language Training
Financial University under the Government of the
Russian Federation
E-mail: ivb66@yandex.ru
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-5027-6484

Natalya N. Balabas
(Russia, Moscow)
Associate Professor, PhD in Philology, Associate
Professor of the Department of Theory and Practice of
Foreign Languages, Institute of Foreign Languages
People's Friendship University of Russia
(RUDN University)
E-mail: balnani@mail.ru
ORCID ID: 0000-0003-2572-5684