

TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN SOVIET AND PRESENT-DAY RUSSIA: A COMPARISON OF TWO SYSTEMS

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Abstract. The paper explores recent changes in standards, forms and practices of teaching foreign languages in the present-day Russia against the system that existed in the Soviet period. A combination of theoretical and empirical methods and research practices are used to demonstrate that the changes were for the best, although most of them were not results of well-balanced state policy meeting new education goals. The research suggests that the current boom in learning foreign languages in Russia is mostly due to the new political, ideological, social and economic climate in the country. The nature and extent of influence produced by external factors on the course content, goals, expected results, teaching methods and resources are further discussed.

Key words: foreign languages, education reform, education policy, language and ideology, language and society.

Introduction

Teaching foreign languages in Russia has a long and complex history. Once being part of elite education enjoyed only by grand princes and their court, foreign languages have come a long way to become in 2004 a discipline on the Core Curriculum for pre-school institutions. This way was marked with various changes and obstacles. One of the recent developments in the field was introduction of the new law on education in 1992 that set up the modern education system in the Russian Federation still working today. The period of over 20 years seems long enough to take a critical look at the newly established system and take stock of the latest changes and reforms. The best way to do it, as it seems, is to compare key components of the present-day system of teaching foreign languages in Russia with those of the Soviet system.

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An omnibus and encyclopedic comparison of the two educational systems embracing all academic fields and levels and encompassing all ideological, political, social and cultural factors is a fundamental task that is yet to be addressed by researchers and educators both in Russia and abroad. In this paper we approached only one aspect of the problem, which, in our opinion, should be of interest to the international audience as until recently Russian education has earned its global reputation mostly in such fields as mathematics and natural science while linguistic education has mostly been out of focus.

The choice of this particular area was also determined by galloping popularity of foreign languages in today's Russia and supported by the authors' expertise and competence in the field resulting from extensive 20-year+ professional experience of developing and implementing language degree programs at institutions of higher education in Russia.

It should be mentioned that a number of issues related to teaching foreign languages in the post-Soviet Russia have recently been discussed in works of modern Russian educators (Galskova, 2003; Mirolyubov, 2002; Solovova, 2002). However, despite the diversity of approaches used by researchers, no attempt has been made to undertake a comparative study of various aspects indicative of the public sentiment towards learning foreign languages in the Soviet and post-perestroika periods and supported by survey results and statistical data. Therefore, in the current paper our goal is to present a critical analysis of the current Russian system of teaching foreign languages as compared against the previous one. As the researched area is extremely large and complex, in the current study we focused on a few key components that should merit primary attention. These include social and political context, specific languages being studied, syllabi, teaching techniques and training resources, teaching goals and expected results. While argued by many researchers (see, e.g., Zamyatin, 2012) that Russia's education system was shaped on the basis of the Soviet one and inherited most of its structures, we expect our findings to demonstrate that teaching foreign languages is one area that has undergone crucial changes over the last twenty years, but is still in a state that leaves much to be desired.

Methods and Procedure

To carry out a comprehensive and thorough comparative analysis of the above mentioned components of the Soviet system of teaching foreign languages and those of the present-day Russia's system, we used a combination of research methods and practices. Theoretical methods include (1) historical analysis that allows providing a detailed description of changes in teaching foreign languages in Russia starting as early as pre-Christian times; (2) a review of current trends in the system of teaching foreign languages in Russia; (3) a comparison between two teaching systems existing in different historical epochs, each being subject to external political, social and cultural influences.

Empirical methods consist in (1) critical analysis of available official statistical data, international and domestic reports and other secondary sources; (2) a survey of over 300 respondents who were requested to fill in a questionnaire regarding their experience of learning foreign languages in Russia.

Historical Background

It goes without saying that any socio-cultural phenomenon is predetermined by various socio-economic and political factors (Sorokin, 1962). Over the history of human civilization multiplicity and diversity of states and nations along with the need for mutual ties and contacts made learning foreign languages a must for establishing intercultural relations. However, as education is subject to many external forces affecting both its forms and content, teaching goals and practices used in any historical period should not be considered in disregard of the relevant social and economic context, therefore, before comparing the Soviet and modern Russian systems of teaching foreign languages, we deem it necessary to provide a short historical review of the main language education features in the Ancient Rus, the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation.

In the Ancient Rus trade and commercial relations were a most important factor stimulating growth and development of international contacts. Trade as a social phenomenon initiated social interaction between ethnic communities speaking different languages. A factor of no less importance when it comes to its influence on the society was religion. With the introduction of Christianity in the Ancient Rus, religion became the main field where foreign languages were in high demand. Nevertheless, despite their essential role in the development of education and general progress in that epoch, foreign languages had not yet become a universally studied discipline.

New horizons were opened for Russia by reforms of Peter the Great whose revolutionary views set up new conceptual benchmarks. Following etiquette rules and speaking foreign languages became fashionable. The general trend to imitate Western culture could not but affect approaches to upbringing and teaching. While public schools continued expanding and growing, home schooling gained popularity in certain circles. Rich aristocratic families hired personal tutors who were native speakers of European languages. The job presupposed round-the-clock interaction with students and permanent residence on their premises. Children who grew up with foreign tutors can therefore be regarded as bilingual since they often used French or German as their second native language. For example, French, as pointed out by Ch. Hoffman (Hoffman 2014: 2), was once “spoken by all members of the European aristocracy as the use of this language signalled membership of the élite”.

The new historical epoch that began after the Revolution of 1917 brought about radical changes in all spheres of life, education being no exception. Early Soviet leaders were not supportive of teaching foreign languages in

public schools. The new Soviet state found itself isolated both politically and economically, therefore, there existed no practical need for speaking any foreign languages. The 20^s of the 20th century were marked with reviving old economic relations with foreign partners and establishing new ones. The period of industrialization required studying the latest technological advances made by Western countries, which presupposed proficiency in foreign languages, so Communist leaders made an appeal to the Soviet youth to start learning languages. As a result, a new multi-stage system of teaching foreign languages was set up. Foreign languages became a compulsory subject both on high school and university curricula.

After World War II the system was further expanded. Spanish became the fourth foreign language (along with English, French and German) taught at public schools in the USSR. Moreover, there appeared new types of public schools in which instruction was conducted in foreign languages. However, all of those advances were in vain as the Cold War period that began soon after World War II was over limited all international contacts to the minimum, as a result, the state and the society were no longer interested in citizens with good practical skills in languages.

Fortunately, the situation changed again in the mid-1950^s with the beginning of the so called Khrushchev Thaw, a period in the Soviet history marked with an uprise in international trade, educational and cultural contacts, and massive involvement in international student festivals and sports competitions. In the history of Soviet Russia this period that lasted until the late 1980^s was probably most beneficial both for teachers and students of foreign languages as educational institutions received adequate funding, pedagogical creativity and student initiative were strongly encouraged, and proficiency in foreign languages became a matter of prestige and was much sought after.

This brief historical overview demonstrates that the history of teaching foreign languages in the tsarist and Soviet Russia had its own ups and downs that first and most were determined by political and socio-economic reasons. The then-current ideological doctrine and philosophical views of the country's leaders had an enormous influence on the system of teaching foreign languages and determined a number of essential issues, such as class organization, course content, number of credit hours, teaching methods, etc. Nevertheless, despite its total dependence on the political climate in the country, by the end of the Soviet era the existing system developed and maintained high academic standards and equipped students with language skills required by the growing economy.

COMPARISON OF TWO MODELS

General Overview

It is a common opinion among many Russians that the collapse of the Soviet Union followed by an imminent decay in all spheres of social life delivered a deadly blow to the education system. As our analysis is restricted only to teaching foreign languages and assessing the current state of other areas requires much additional research, in this section we aim to demonstrate that reforms of the post-perestroika period related to teaching foreign languages yielded a more flexible and functional system that is in line with present-day Russian realities. Advantages of the new system that originated on the ruins of the Soviet one are as follows:

- more humanistic nature of education in general with a special emphasis on foreign languages;
- student-oriented approaches;
- introduction of communicative teaching methods;
- course content free of ideological principles;
- early learning of foreign languages;
- supplementary courses at education institutions of all levels;
- commercial language courses.

A new wave of interest in foreign languages in the post-perestroika period can be explained by a radical change in social and political priorities. The new rhythm of life in the country affected by wider international contacts, inflow of foreign investments, emergence of a new class of businessmen and development of mass tourism determined new goals and conditions of teaching foreign languages, especially English as the leading language of global business and commerce, in order to meet the growing demand for assistance in the sphere of intercultural communication.

We find strong relationship between ideological doctrines determining the social and political climate in the USSR and the content of all educational programs aimed at teaching only basic passive skills in languages. Of course, it would have been unthinkable to exclude foreign languages from high school and university curricula as the Soviet Union billed its educational system as one of the best ones, but years of studying languages at school and then at institutions of higher education did not lead to any outstanding results: students were expected to acquire only basic reading and understanding skills.

After the change of the political course towards democracy, speaking at least one foreign language becomes essential both personally and professionally. A specialist with good language skills has much better chances of finding a good position as employers are interested in staff fluent in languages other than Russian. A high demand for such professionals on the labor market had a profound impact on the system of teaching foreign languages as regards

both the course content and structure. In the following sections our focus will be on analyzing major aspects of foreign language teaching in Russia with a particular emphasis on stages of education, alternative learning options, language preferences and teaching methods.

Stages and levels of education

Over the last two decades significant changes were introduced in the sphere of public education. Ideas of early language learning that have been increasingly popular with European and American researchers (García Mayo & García Lecumberri, 2003; Muñoz, 2006; Nikolov & Curtain, 2000; Nikolov, 2002; Nikolov & Mihaljevič Djigunovič, 2006; Nikolov, 2009) gained their fans among the new generation of Russian educators. In the Russian Federation English has become an obligatory subject since 2004 when it was introduced into the Core Curriculum of primary school. Moreover, it is now taught starting from the second grade, which is generally in line with common European trends, as indicated in the report prepared by Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (Key Data in Teaching Languages at School in Europe, 2012). This decision, as stated by N. Malkina (Malkina, 2008: 26), “demonstrated that the Russian state has finally acknowledged that learning and teaching languages is a priority area?”

As the new concept of profile was introduced in upper secondary classes in 2003, there appear more schools and classes where a particular emphasis is put on studying foreign languages. According to data retrieved from *profile-edu.ru*, a Russian portal on education, currently, in Russian upper secondary schools students who chose foreign languages as subjects of intensive studies get six hours of instruction in English per week while the compulsory minimum set in the basic curriculum is three hours per week. As for general schools offering intensive studies in foreign languages, it should be noted that they existed in the Soviet era as well, but their number was extremely low and they were mostly located in Moscow and other large industrial cities.

Another innovation in the series of education reforms of the 1990s affected teaching foreign languages to middle and high school students: in 1992 the new Law on Education which outlined a new vision on education bringing into focus arts, humanities and social sciences legalized private schools where learning English was among top priorities. Besides the new types of school, there appear all sorts of institutions offering supplementary courses meeting all levels and goals. These are mostly privately-owned educational centers, which is also an innovation of the post-perestroika period.

Recent years have also witnessed changes in the system of teaching foreign languages in the higher education sector. As indicated by many sources (see, e.g. Khaleeva, 2014), the number of students studying languages has increased considerably. A new educational program has been designed to meet the growing demand for specialists trained in at least one foreign language –

translator in the sphere of professional communication. Successful completion of the optional course by non-linguist students results in an additional professional degree which makes college graduates better candidates in the eyes of potential employers. According to figures cited by I. I. Khaleeva, Head of the Curriculum Board for Linguistic Education in Russian Institutions of Higher Education, in 2012 the “Translator in the sphere of professional communication” educational program was offered in about 350 universities across the Russian Federation (Khaleeva, 2014). The course is especially popular among students specializing in technology and engineering. A survey conducted in 2014 among 1000 students studying at Tula State University for non-linguistic degrees revealed that about 7% of respondents had successfully completed or were about to complete the program, while 12% were considering the possibility of signing up for the course.

The figures are not surprising taking into consideration the situation in the Russian labor market with 67% percent of Eastern companies and 52% of Western companies requiring that their potential employees be fluent in a foreign language, as suggested by results of a survey carried out by the Head-Hunter personnel agency in 2012 in 14 Russian cities with a population over a million people and published on *career.ru*. At the same time, as stated in the report, 96% of young job seekers beginning their career indicated being trained in at least one foreign language, the most popular ones being English (over 75% of CVs), German (about 13%) and French (8.5%). Wider range of professional skills demanded by large and small companies operating in Russia along with high competition on the labor market stimulated further progress in the field of teaching foreign languages while in the Soviet system of planned economy college graduates were guaranteed job placement and did not have to worry about unemployment.

Despite the rising popularity of language courses designed for academic or occupational purposes, some education scholars point to the fact that, just like in the Soviet Union, Russian ESP continues to develop in isolation which may not embrace all aspects of teaching but still largely affects focus, methodology, materials and professional development (Frumina & West, 2012; Winetroube & Kuznetsova, 2002). In a recent study E. Frumina and R. West (2012) attribute this fact to the narrow-focused orientation of Russian ESP courses as opposed to broader foreign approaches. As a result, the misbalanced system produces specialists and academics empowered with excellent reading and understanding skills but failing at effective communication. Results of a survey conducted in 2014 among post-graduate students enrolled in Ph.D. programs at the Department of Humanities and Social Disciplines of Tula State University revealed that 82% of respondents felt least confident about being active participants in a communicative situation that presupposed some speaking or writing in a foreign language on their part. On the other hand, over 74% of post-graduate students interviewed in the course of this research evaluated their grammar and reading skills as good or very good.

A possible explanation for this phenomenon observed by other scholars as well was offered by V. Zabotkina (Zabotkina, 2002) who points to overuse of the grammar translation method and disregard for communicative methods as significant drawbacks of the existing system in which the emphasis is put on reading and translation of specialized texts in particular areas of studies. So, modernized and fine-tuned in accordance with international trends, the present-day system of teaching foreign languages in public institutions is still facing challenges and struggling to find new ways of breaking away with the Soviet past.

Alternative learning options

Any analysis of the present-day Russian system of teaching foreign languages would be incomplete without at least a cursory survey of additional learning settings highly popular with Russian students and their parents. Private lessons are a traditional alternative to in-class instruction, and there is a high demand for foreign language teachers on the Russian shadow education market. The practice of supplementary tutoring goes back to Soviet times when hiring a private instructor in foreign languages was a matter of prestige just like having a resident tutor in the tsarist Russia was indicative of the family's wealth and high social status. However, this was not a common phenomenon as only few families could afford it. On the contrary, in the recent years private tutoring has been on the rise, which is just in line with the situation in other parts of the world where, according to studies conducted across Asian and European countries, including states of the former socialist bloc (Bray, 2006; Ireson, 2004; Silova, 2010), private supplementary tutoring has grown dramatically.

A variety of private supplementary tutoring in Russia is after-school coaching: school teachers offer additional lessons to their students for extra fees while officially education remains free. After-school coaching as a pedagogical phenomenon is quite common not just among foreign language teachers but also among school instructors teaching hard sciences.

On the one hand, the emergence and growth of this form of supplementary schooling in the post-Soviet Russia was quite consistent with the general educational context of the 1990s, when lack of adequate financing resulted in outdated textbooks and means of instruction, shortage of qualified teaching staff, and general low quality of public school education while on the other hand, it agrees with the global tendency of a rising demand in the shadow education sector as reported by international education scholars (Bray, 2006; Heyneman, 2011; Ireson, 2004; Silova, 2010).

The main cause of private tutoring that justifies the existence of this educational form is eliminating drawbacks of the mainstream educational system. In the post-perestroika Russia consumer demand for tutoring services rose to unprecedented numbers as fluency in English came to be regarded as a guarantee of a successful career in future while shortcomings of mainstream

methodology and overcrowded classrooms in public schools made it next to impossible to master a foreign language during official class hours.

To provide an adequate description of the nature and extent of tutoring in the Soviet Union and Russia we asked over 300 respondents to complete a questionnaire survey providing information about their personal experience as regards private tutoring. The respondents were divided into three age groups: group I (aged over 40), group II (aged between 30 and 40), and group III (aged under 30). The criterion for division was the respondents' exposure to the Soviet or Russian education system respectively. People born in 1974 and earlier were at least 17 years old in 1991 – the year the Soviet Union collapsed – and therefore taught on the basis of Soviet standards and practices throughout their middle and high school years. Respondents in the second group were educated in the transitional period when some Soviet customs were still preserved while others gave way to new Russian practices. Finally, the third group was constituted by young people under 30 who have experienced all advantages of the newly emerged system starting from their primary school.

All three groups were given detailed questionnaires containing several blocks of questions regarding their personal experience of studying foreign languages in different life periods and different stages of the education process. Questions in the fact block were related to such parameters of the language learning process as place of instruction, requirements, course duration and intensity, number of students in class, availability of supplementary materials, etc. The evaluation block included questions on respondents' personal opinion about the necessity and prestige of learning foreign languages, usefulness of tutoring and effectiveness of specific teaching methods.

The survey indicated that the market for private classes in foreign languages has been growing steadily, with 69% of participants in group III reporting that they had been in receipt of tutoring in foreign languages at some stage during their school or university career against 42% in group II and 15% in group I.

Table 1: Tutoring received in different life stages

Did you receive tutoring in foreign languages at some stage in your life?	Group I	Group II	Group III
during school years	11%	31%	48%
during university years	2%	7%	13%
as an adult	2%	4%	8%

There is also a tendency among younger people taking private classes in foreign languages to employ tutors for longer periods.

Table 2: Periods for which language tutors were employed

For how long were you in receipt of tutoring in foreign languages?	Group I	Group II	Group III
about a year	16%	11%	8%
2–3 years	77%	71%	63%
over 3 years	7%	18%	29%

Reasons for the employment of language tutors were also investigated, and the most popular motivation in all of the groups was the desire to improve practical skills while respondents in groups II and III also indicated the need to be better prepared for examinations (57% and 81% respectively).

Table 3: Reasons for employing a language tutor

What was your motivation for employing a language tutor? (respondents could indicate several reasons)	Group I	Group II	Group III
<i>Education:</i>			
to pass school final exams	38%	57%	81%
to demonstrate better performance on tests	34%	32%	33%
to pass international language exams	–	<1%	3%
to study abroad	–	<1%	2%
<i>Career:</i>			
to meet employers' demands	–	8%	5%
for professional development	<1%	12%	11%
<i>Recreation:</i>			
to travel abroad	11%	17%	15%
to read books / watch movies / listen to music, etc. in foreign languages	14%	18%	22%
to browse foreign websites / communicate with foreigners on the Internet	3%	22%	27%
<i>Personal:</i>			
to emigrate to another country	<1%	2%	4%
other reasons	5%	3%	3%

Overall, 23% of participants agreed that there were clear associations between tutoring and the cultural and socio-economic status of families receiving such services.

Table 4: Associations between tutoring and students' social status revealed

Do you perceive employment of a language tutor to be indicative of students' social status?	Group I	Group II	Group III
yes	48%	74%	67%
no	14%	10%	12%
cannot say	38%	16%	21%

Most respondents assessed their private classes in foreign languages as highly effective and indicated that they were worth the money.

Table 5: Effectiveness of tutoring evaluated

How useful were these classes?	Group I	Group II	Group III
school classes	12%	15%	21%
university classes	9%	17%	34%
private classes	62%	74%	87%
language courses for special purposes and other supplementary classes	48%	51%	53%

Thus, the results suggest that the prevalence of private tutoring in foreign languages is considerably higher in present-day Russia than in the USSR, and it has been on the increase especially since 2004 when a single, nationwide standardized exam was introduced for students leaving school after grade 11. Despite their costliness, private classes are still the most preferred form of learning foreign languages in Russia as they are perceived to bring about better results and their overall usefulness is felt to exceed that of courses taken at school or university.

Language preferences

Availability of language courses offered to potential learners in the USSR and present-day Russia also demonstrates drastic changes that affected the system of teaching foreign languages. While Soviet school and university students

could choose one in four foreign languages (English, German, French, and Spanish), the choice was a formal one and in reality often there existed only one option. Due to specifics of planned economy, students were distributed into language groups on the basis of quotas set out by the government, any personal preferences regarding the choice of a language to learn considered of no significance and ignored.

Today parents have the right to choose the language their children will study at school while students attending institutions of higher education make their own choice. In most cases, the first-choice foreign language in present-day Russia is English. For example, in 2014 78% of first-year students at Tula State University chose English as their first foreign language with German being second in popularity (12% of students) and French marking the third place (10%).

Despite the fact that English keeps gaining in popularity both among students and their parents, general proficiency in it remains quite low. As indicated on the EF English Proficiency Index website, the general level of English proficiency in Russia measured by the Index puts it in the 22nd place among 24 European nations and in the 36th place among 63 countries of the world covered by the survey. Moreover, since 2012 the index has shown a falling tendency, reaching the notch of 50.43 in 2014 against 51.07 in 2013 and 52.78 in 2012.

This data is consistent with results of a survey on fluency in foreign languages conducted by Levada-Center, a non-governmental Russian polling and sociological research organization. According to the information provided on its website, the survey was held in April 2014 and covered 1602 participants over 18 years of age having permanent residence in 130 localities across Russia. Respondents were asked whether they were more or less fluent in any foreign language and if so, requested to specify the language(s). 70% of participants replied that they were not fluent in any foreign languages. 13% of respondents admitted having some language skills, but did not consider themselves fluent. It is worth noting that in accordance with the data obtained by Levada-Center, the number of people fluent in English is greater among young adults (22% against 3% among senior citizens), respondents with a university degree (20% against 6% among people with incomplete school education) and well-to-do and rich population (21% and 18% respectively against 8% among respondents with low income). The figures indicate that the current system of teaching foreign languages in Russia is more efficient as compared to the Soviet system, so the number of people fluent in English and other languages can be expected to rise in near future.

As suggested by statistic data and supported by information revealed by students and their parents interviewed in the course of the research, studying a foreign language to many Russians is synonymous with studying English, which is in line with international trends. Other foreign languages in present-day Russia are studied either as second-choice languages or for specific purposes, most of them career-related.

Teaching methods

Teaching any discipline, foreign languages not being an exception, involves using various teaching methods and training resources. Over the last two decades the pool of teaching techniques and aids has considerably broadened to include the latest advances offered by technical progress. This is one of the main reasons due to which there exists such a deep abyss between teaching methods and materials used in the Soviet Union and present-day Russia. On-line and e-textbooks are increasingly gaining in popularity. A variety of audio, video and other multimedia teaching aids are now available to high school and university language teachers across Russia. When asked about special software, electronic and multimedia materials used in their foreign language classrooms, 98% of high school students and 92% of university students participating in the survey conducted in Tula in 2014 answered positively.

However, besides technological progress, there are other factors affecting the choice of teaching resources, their content and structure, and in the USSR it was the nation's ideological doctrine that played the key role in the decision-making process in any public sector, including education. The course contents, teaching techniques and resources had to be approved by a special commission before they could be used by teachers and students.

In present-day Russia there are no limitations as regards the course contents and topics discussed in class, the only exception being propaganda of terrorism, extremism, ethnic violence and intolerance while in the Soviet Union only politically correct course materials were approved by the Ministry of Education and could be used in the teaching process. Foreign course books and supplementary materials were not an option for Soviet teachers of foreign languages as they were seen as a potential means of spreading undesirable information about life in the West, therefore the only kind of teaching aids available were local course books written by Soviet educators and full of texts about the Great October Socialist Revolution, Young Pioneers, leaders of the Communist party and hardships of working people living in capitalist countries.

As it has already been mentioned, the goal of teaching any foreign language in the Soviet Union was to develop minimum receptive skills while productive skills were by no means a priority. As a result, Soviet course books never included any audio resources even when there were no technical obstacles to playing recorded materials in class. Communicative teaching methods were neither recognized nor used in class, all student efforts being focused on doing grammar exercises and translating selected texts.

Another significant difference between teaching techniques and resources employed in the two epochs is related to their quantity and variety. In the USSR there was only one officially approved methodology and one set of textbooks and supplementary materials developed under strict control on the part of the Ministry of Education. This kind of approach was not a fruitful one as far as student interests and pedagogical creativity were concerned. Today

high school teachers in Russia have the freedom to choose one of a few sets of course books recommended by the Ministry of Education and Science and use any supplementary teaching aids, including his or her personal resources. Tutors in institutions of higher education are allowed to develop their own in-house materials, and 72% of university tutors interviewed in the course of this research admitted using their own resources.

Summing up what has been said in this section, we cannot deny the benefits students and teachers of foreign languages have received recently along with new advancements in technology, but as for the situation in post-perestroika Russia, we deem it necessary to emphasize that the change in national ideology was the key factor determining what teaching methods and resources are currently used both in state and private education institutions across Russia.

Concluding Remarks

While there is evidence demonstrating that a transition from the Soviet education system to the new Russian system brought about negative consequences in some areas, such as teaching minority languages (see, e.g., Zamyatin, 2012), our findings indicate that recent changes actually encouraged learning of foreign languages and produced a great increase in the number of students willing to study more than one foreign language, including rare and exotic ones.

The following table attempts to summarize the main differences between the systems of teaching foreign languages in the Soviet Union and the post-perestroika Russia in terms of the socio-economic situation, specific languages being taught, syllabi, teaching techniques and training resources, teaching goals and expected results.

The following conclusions seem worth making:

While the system of education in present-day Russia is generally based on standards and practices introduced in the Soviet Union, teaching foreign languages is one of the few fields in which major changes occurred over the last twenty years. Although the changes were welcomed by the majority of students and teachers, most of them were not results of well-balanced state policy meeting new education goals, but rather developments caused by a combination of external factors, such as political, social, economic and cultural situation in the country.

The Soviet Union was for a long time isolated from international social, economic and cultural life and the aftermath of this period is still apparent in present-day Russia which despite all efforts, including government support administered via federal education standards, is a nation where only modest numbers of people can boast fluency in foreign languages.

Table 6: Teaching and learning foreign languages in the USSR and post-Soviet Russia: a comparative overview

Aspect under comparison	Soviet period	Post-perestroika period (1990s – up to present)
Social and political situation in the country	The epoch of the Iron Curtain, a totalitarian state with the administrative-command system executing control over all spheres of life, including education. Ideological conflict with countries whose official languages are part of the school curriculum.	Collapse of the USSR. Considerable growth of international contacts, development of mass tourism. Depolitization of education. Emergence of new companies with foreign capital. Russia joins World Trade Organization.
Social demand for fluency in foreign languages	The social and economic situation in the country does not create any demand for people with language skills.	There is a high demand for employees fluent in foreign languages. Specialists with good language skills are sought for by employers in all sectors of economy.
Organizational and structural aspects	Foreign languages are studied by pupils in middle and high school and by undergraduate and graduate students in institutions of higher education.	New stages of learning foreign languages are introduced. Foreign languages are now studied in pre-school, primary school, middle school, high school and institutions of higher education. The system of supplementary education develops. The concept of profile is introduced.

Preferred languages	Language pluralism: English, German, French, and Spanish are taught in state schools.	English becomes the first-choice foreign language. French and German are studied as second-choice foreign languages, mostly in schools with intensive studies of languages.
Teaching resources	Textbooks written by Soviet educators, often filled with mistakes and Russisms. The choice of course books is strictly regulated.	Popularity of foreign course books: glossy books with nice pictures and audio materials. A variety of course books to choose from. Extensive use of online and e-textbooks, audio, video and multimedia teaching aids.
Course content	'Knowledge-centric' model: memorization and reproduction of information arranged according to the thematic principle. Course contents highly ideologized.	Emphasis on development of communicative skills. Focus on learning foreign languages in order to facilitate intercultural communication.
Communication with native speakers	Learners of foreign languages have practically no chance of communicating with native speakers.	Considerable expansion of contacts with foreigners in all spheres. It is now possible to communicate with native speakers both in person and via any communication channels available.
Planned results	Receptive language skills: reading and understanding selected texts in foreign languages.	Productive languages skills, ability to communicate both orally and in writing.

This study aimed to explore the current state of the present-day system of teaching foreign languages in Russia and compare it against Soviet education legacies. The analysis was restricted to social and political context, specific languages being studied, syllabi, teaching techniques and training resources, teaching goals and expected results and did not address the issue of quality of modern language education. No attempt was made to assess practical skills gained by students learning foreign languages in the Soviet Union and in the Russian Federation or professional qualifications of language degree holders who were graduated from Soviet and Russian institutions of higher education respectively. However, this seems to be a promising field for future research as the current trends of commercializing foreign language learning in Russia may be suggestive of a general decrease in the quality of teaching.

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Викторија Иванова и Ирина Тивјаева
НАСТАВА СТРАНИХ ЈЕЗИКА У РУСИЈИ У ВРЕМЕ
СОВЈЕТСКОГ САВЕЗА И ДАНАС: ПОРЕЂЕЊЕ ДВА СИСТЕМА
Анстракт

Рад се бави скорашњим променама у стандардима, облицима и пракси наставе страних језика у данашњој Русији у поређењу са системом који је постојао у периоду Совјетског Савеза. Користи се комбинација теоријских и емпиријских метода и истраживачких пракси како би се показало да су промене имале позитиван утицај, иако већина њих није произашла из уравнотежене државне политике усклађене са испуњавањем нових образовних циљева. Истраживање показује да је тренутно велико интересовање за учење страних језика у Русији углавном последица нове политичке, идеолошке, социјалне и економске климе у земљи. У закључку се разматрају природа и степен утицаја спољашњих фактора на садржај курсева страних језика, њихове циљеве, очекиване резултате, наставне методе и литературу.

Кључне речи: страни језици, реформа образовања, образовна политика, језик и идеологија, језик и друштво.

Виктория Иванова и Ирина Тивьяева
ОБУЧЕНИЕ ИНОСТРАННЫМ ЯЗЫКАМ В РОССИИ
В СОВЕТСКИЙ И ПОСТСОВЕТСКИЙ ПЕРИОДЫ:
СРАВНИТЕЛЬНО-АНАЛИТИЧЕСКИЙ ОБЗОР

Резюме

В статье предпринимается попытка сравнительного анализа стандартов, форм и принципов преподавания иностранных языков в современной России и России советского периода. Используя теоретические и эмпирические методы исследования, авторы указывают на положительные результаты реформ в системе образования, отмечая при этом несбалансированность государственной политики в сфере образования и ее несоответствие новым целям. Результаты исследования позволяют утверждать, что сегодняшний подъем в изучении иностранных языков в России связан, в первую очередь, с изменившейся политико-идеологической и социально-экономической ситуацией в стране. Авторы рассматривают природу и степень влияния внешних факторов на содержание языковых курсов, методические материалы, а также цели, ожидаемые результаты и методику преподавания.

Ключевые слова: иностранные языки, реформы образования, политика в области образования, язык и идеология, язык и общество.