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Foreign Language Learning in Modern Russia and the World: National Peculiarities in Aims, Reasons and Methods

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The paper presents preliminary results of a survey conducted in order to single out cultural peculiarities of Foreign Language Learning (FLL) in various countries. The survey concerns the aims, reasons and methods of studying foreign languages.

A contrastive study involving foreign language learners from different world regions and of different age groups has been needed to identify what is national about the process in Russia.

For the survey three groups of respondents have been defined:

1. University students, graduates and PhD students in the Russian Federation (Tertiary school students and graduates);
2. Primary and secondary school students in Moscow;
3. International university students, graduates, PhD students and trainees in the Russian Federation.

The age of RF tertiary school respondents is 17-25 years, of primary and secondary school students – 9-16 years (mainly 14-16 years), of international respondents – 13-42 years (mainly 20-26 years).

International respondents represent the following countries: the USA, Italy, the People's Republic of China, the Czech Republic, the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea), the Republic of Austria, the Commonwealth of Australia, Hungary, the Republic of Cyprus, the Federative Republic of Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Iceland, the Republic of Haiti, the United Republic of Tanzania. The majority comes from the USA (38%) and China (20,4%).

The native language of international respondents has been taken into account as it could be English or one of the European languages, which might make some difference to the statistics. As for the native language of Russian respondents, we stopped keeping statistics on it as it never coincided with ones under study.

The questionnaires for both groups of Russian respondents were in Russian, for international – in English.

The subject matter was the same for all the groups: the length of study, reasons, aims and ways to study foreign languages and cultures.

There could be one answer only to the questions regarding the age, native country and native language, first, second and third studied languages.

Questions regarding aims, reasons, ways of studying languages, cultural aspects of interest and studied languages for Russian secondary school students and international respondents – allowed several answers. That is why in these cases total figures regarding one group may outnumber 100%.

Methods of the research: live and online polling; comparing and contrasting the results.

The article under discussion considers the results of polling 144 respondents from the 1st group, 47 – from the 2nd and 44 from the 3rd.

The results of the survey confirm the well-known fact that the English language is the most studied nowadays both in Russia and in the world, and as D. Graddol points out, "there are no clear rivals to English"[1]. What's more, foreign language learners in Russia usually take up two, sometimes three and even four languages. The most common combination of languages under study is English as a first and French or German as a second one. Spanish or Italian are taken up less often. In other countries the choice depends mostly upon the region.

The poll shows that on the whole in Russia people start learning foreign languages earlier than in other countries and devote more time, money and effort to it. However on the international level that depends much upon the region and the chosen language.

According to the results of the survey for Russian people the main reasons to take up a foreign language are the following: understanding that this very language is "a must" in modern world, good language skills are needed to get a good job. Language skills are also needed for travelling purposes. An interest towards the country where the language is used as a means of communication is also important. For small kids the reason to take up a foreign language is predominantly their parent's wish and the fact that it is an obligatory subject at school. International respondents are mostly motivated by an interest towards the language and culture and less by career prospects.

Cultural knowledge and broadening the horizons are of almost equal importance for all the three groups of respondents. School children in Russia are mainly oriented towards getting a good job, whereas tertiary school students value the knowledge itself as they probably have already understood that good knowledge gives better chances to get a good job and many other things. International respondents are mostly aimed at broadening the horizons which appears to be quite natural, due to the popularity of love and interest towards languages and cultures as a reason to start studying it.

Russian students use all the ways possible to study foreign languages. The majority of the respondents point out several ways to study a language which evidently indicates an immense importance of the subject. For international audience the most popular and often the only way to study a language is learning it at school or university.

From what has been said above we can conclude that through comparison with other countries we can single out the peculiarities of studying foreign languages typical of Russia. Having carried out such a contrastive study we can therefore see that in Russia studying foreign languages and cultures plays a key role in continuing education and getting a good job. However at the same time it is kind of a hobby and a passion that may be considered a trait of Russian national character[2].

Литература

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