

Most effective educational technologies in the era of coronavirus: Case-study and e-learning Russian as a foreign language

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Abstract

The article substantiates the need for the use of the most effective educational technologies in the process of distance teaching communication disciplines in the era of coronavirus. As the main effective educational distance technology, the case-study method is presented. It allows to identify the competence level of students with the maximum of communication completeness. The content of the cases is given, the conditions and features of their use in new reality of self-isolation and distance teaching are revealed, the technology of case development is considered, and the method of the case-study application role games is presented. The article presents some results of using case-study method in teaching English language speaking students a Russian language writing. Online case-study technology brings the learning process closer to the real practice of preparing texts of different journalism genres and style. This is fully facilitated by two role games as follow: “The interview with a director of a theatre performance” and “The writing a feature article”. During the role game “The interview with a director of a theatre performance” students should prepare, conduct, and record the interview with a director of a theatre performance, and then present it (the interview) online in the form of an article designed for a newspaper or magazine, having stood the formal and substantive requirements of the genre of interview. During the role game “The writing a feature article” in accordance with the topic proposed by teacher, students should identify the problem to be analyzed, determine the vector of representation of the examined problem, and write a feature article due to its genre-forming and genre-defining parameters.

Key words: communication, competence, education, e-learning, case-study, case-technology, case-method, role play, Russian as a foreign language (RFL), teaching writing, journalism style, feature article, interview, coronavirus

Introduction

Due to highly competitive educational environment, transition of state educational standards to new versions displays intention of the Ministry of education of the Russian Federation to reduction of hours of theoretical courses and increasing of time for practical work. New rules should not be aiming just at transferring knowledge for “the modern approach to learning should focus on the introduction of the learning process of novelty, due to the characteristics of the dynamics of life and activity, the specifics of the various technologies of learning and the needs of the individual, society and the state in the development of students socially useful knowledge, beliefs, traits and qualities of character, relationships and behavior experience” (Bagirov, Burykhin, 2012: 118). The end of 2019 and 2020 created a new reality in the world due to the pandemic COVID-19, ensured self-isolation of the population for several months, transferred education in schools and universities to remote mode, which required a quick response from the pedagogical community to the challenges of time, rethinking the traditional learning process in various fields, including foreign languages, finding effective tools and methods for e-teaching Russian as a foreign language.

It has become obvious today, in the new e-learning reality in the era of coronavirus, that is necessary to manage not only the personality of a student, but also the process

of its development. Interactive distance teaching means and methods allow in education to increase the level of acquisition of knowledge, enrich communication skills and stimulate the growth of learning abilities of students, which is a necessary condition for improving competencies (Ukhova, 2012a; Caliskan et al., 2019).

The purpose of this article is to identify the most effective educational technologies in the process of distance teaching communication disciplines in the era of coronavirus.

Literature Review

The communication concept implements the goal and means of training the interaction of specialists in professional activities to increase their communicative competence. Students need to improve the culture of communication, know the forms and methods of influencing the addressee, be able to adequately perceive and respond to the information received (Vezhbirskaia, 1999; Stepanov, 2008; Ostrikova et al., 2018; Aleshchanova et al. 2019; Razumovskaya et al., 2018; Vikulova et al., 2020). Being the basic competence of teaching a foreign language, communicative competence expands communication opportunities and contributes to increasing the motivation of students to learn a foreign language. "From the point of view of the productivity of educational activities, an orientation towards cognitive interest as a motive in learning a foreign language is justified, since the achievement of professional motivation is formed on the basis of sustained cognitive interest" (Obraztsov, Ivanova, 2005: 123).

Unlike traditional teaching, where the student's active participation is minimal, the case-study method (Yin, 1984; Eisenhardt, 1989; Hamel, Dufour & Fortin, 1993; Stake, 1995; Soy, 1997), which requires the student's involvement in classroom and independent work (Kuimova, 2010), is presented as an effective method of teaching. It should be emphasized that the technology can be implemented in different situations by different performers in different ways (Zobrik, Khudaikulova, 2007).

The main emphasis is placed on the personal component of the teacher's activities. In addition, components such as the features of the contingent of students, their general mood and the psychological climate in the group are significant (Kasatkina et al., 2011; Serebryantseva, 2020). Case-study can be developed by a teacher, students, or taken from special literature, both in Russian and in a foreign language.

Case-study as an educational technology is an analysis, discussion of a situation or a specific case in the form of a business role game (Zeldovich, 2011; Weiss & Bucuvala, 1980). The case for analysis should reflect the real-life situation, which can be discussed from the point of view of the specialty of students. The situation should contain a problem that students need to solve. For example, in the situation with coronavirus when introducing a certain topic, psychologists discuss cases from a psychological point of view, sociologists from a sociological point of view, political scientists from a political point of view, teachers from a pedagogical point of view, etc. in the virtual reality in social networks (Gabrielova et al., 2020).

Thus, the main educational question in the era of coronavirus needs to be resolved: How can we use the most effective educational technologies in the practice of teaching Russian as a foreign language in the situation with distance learning? And then another question is natural: How can we use the case-technology in the practice of e-learning Russian as a foreign language in the discussion of problems of real COVID-19 situation?

Methodology

One of the new forms of effective e-learning technologies is problem-situational learning via cases. The implementation of case-study method into the practice of education in Russia is a currently very urgent task. Used in the preparation of bachelors of Humanities such interactive method as case-study, is the most effective,

as it provides building of core competencies in the e-learning process: communication, leadership, ability to analyze in short time large amount of disordered information, making decisions under stress and with incomplete information, creating texts of different genres and stylistic focus, online communication competence and other competences (Arutyunova, 1999; Zheltukhina et al., 2016). “In this capacity, he serves as a fundamentally necessary addition to the lecture method of training, which is a structure-forming part of the learning process in classical University education system” (Ukhova, Nikkareva, 2014: 70).

Case-technology (method) of teaching is considered as e-learning by doing. The acquisition of knowledge and the formation of skills occur because of independent activity of students in resolving contradictions, creating professional knowledge, skills, abilities and developing mental abilities. “The case is a description of a specific real situation, prepared in a certain format and designed to teach students the analysis of different types of information, its generalization, skills of problem formulation and development of possible solutions in accordance with the established criteria” (Bagirov, Burykhin, 2012: 123).

The case-study method is not just a methodological innovation, but implementing of the method is related directly to changing of the current situation in distance education. It can be said that the method is aimed not so much at the development of specific knowledge or skills, but at the development of the general intellectual and communicative potential of the student and the teacher.

So, the case-technology includes several stages (Zeldovich, 2011: 11):

1. Introduction to the situation.
2. Division of students into groups.
3. Study of the situation.
4. Discussion on the situation in groups, and distribution of roles within the group.
5. Role play (analysis of the situation, decision-making, its design).
6. Summarizing, and analysis of the activities of the groups, and assessment of the role performance by students.
7. Analysis of the optimal option.
8. Plenary, or concluding, discussion.

In a role game, each participant performs actions similar to that of ordinary people do in real life, but taking into account the acceptance of the conditions set by an assignment. The role games are used as a means of practical training, and serve as a means of learning the rules of a certain type of behavior, displaying the development of decision-making process, and building a certain type of thinking. Role-playing games are actively used in teaching foreign languages. For example, role-playing games in Russian lessons as a foreign language are described (Zheleznyakova, 2017), methodology for organizing role-playing games of a problematic orientation in distance learning of foreign languages: on the material of the English language is proposed (Titarenko, 2007).

Results and Discussion

Widely spread in the West the so called “simulation games” or “game simulations” create a simulation model considered as a given indicative structure of the reproducible activity. Thus, in this article under the term “role game” is meant a simulation, a model, a simplified reproduction of a communication situation in the form of a game (Zeldovich, 2011: 19) in online reality in the era of coronavirus.

This article is devoted to the peculiarities of distance teaching of a written text to American students who are trained in Russian as a foreign language in the framework of the Middlebury College program (Vermont). The specificity of this program is full immersion of foreign students in the Russian language, the rejection of communication in the native language. In this regard, the so-called elective e-courses play an important role in the teaching system of the RCU, as they perform the

function of individualization of e-education and compensation of the limited opportunities of basic courses to meet the diverse needs of students, which become very popular in the context of general language training of trainees.

The elective e-course “Writing” is intended for the advanced level of training. It is assumed that students are familiar with the grammar of the Russian language at a high level, have a large vocabulary. In this course, written speech is understood as the ability to combine words in writing to express thoughts in accordance with the circumstances of the situation of communication.

In the syllabus of the e-course “Written speech|language” it is noted that students studying in Russian universities should be able to plan, and write an abstract, summary, review, and present online the results of research in accordance with their diploma thesis.

For some categories of students studying at the faculties, which profile is associated with technology, industry, commercial and diplomatic activities, a student should be supplemented by the formation of skills to do business correspondence regarding the structural, lexical, and grammatical features of such types of business writing as diplomatic, commercial, industrial letters. Currently, the Russian official business style is undergoing changes associated with the adoption of the Russian official speech international style standards, but the official business style is conservative, so along with the new forms of business documents (CV) old official documents (autobiography) are actively used.

Didactic units of this course include work with texts of different genres according to the nature of the professional profile of students. Special attention is paid to the style design of the students' written speech. It is assumed that students should master the basic characteristics of the functional styles of modern Russian literary language.

The communication trend in e-learning written language criteria is obvious: the student outlines his thoughts in the required form of writing so to target a certain Russian-speaking public.

The e-course “Writing” is built on the “from simple to complex and very complex” principle.

1 block.

Types of speech.

The study of style differentiation in the Russian language as a rule does not cause any difficulties to students, they are quite receptive to a typological and stylistic variety of speech and using the table “Functional styles of modern Russian literary language” give a detailed analytical description of texts of different stylistic direction.

The design of the text-reasoning is the only difficulty because American students are not used to divide information into paragraphs, and especially in writing statements based upon metalinguistic constructions (introductory words, rhetorical questions, figures of joint activity, etc.).

2 block.

Colloquial speech in the system of functional varieties of the Russian literary language.

At this stage, students should learn such genres of spoken style as a note, SMS, letter, greeting card, diary. It should be noted that in this case, students without any difficulties cope with the tasks set before them: quickly and correctly determine the genre of the text and create their own statements in the frame of a particular genre variety.

3 block.

Science style.

In the genres of the science speech specific vocabulary, complicated and complex syntactic constructions, logical structure of speech are used, and all this causes great difficulties for foreign students.

The work begins with an introduction to the types of reading (global, detailed, critical) and ways of processing information in secondary texts. Of course, special difficulties arise in critical reading, since the work with the Russian secondary text genres (review, abstract, review) is difficult for English speaking students. However, experience shows that in the presence of speech clichés that serve the genres of critical reading, trainees can create both a review and an essay on a scientific problem. In addition, at this stage, students should prepare their future course work in the framework of Russian culture studies. In this course, they should learn how to draw the title and content up, as well as write an introduction.

4 block.

Official business style.

As for work with business documents, there is, primarily, the total demand for the ability to issue different types of documents is taken into consideration. As a rule, by this time the interns are already determined by the place of work, so the most popular genre is that of resumé, which they create as a test assignment. As for other genres of official business style, there are mainly given assignments such as follows:

- 1) “Find errors in the text of the document (min six errors), correct them, and submit an edited version”;
- 2) “Describe the genre of the text, justify your description”.

5 block.

Journalism style.

Finally, the most difficult to deal with is the journalism texts. However, by this stage of learning, American students have significantly expanded and qualitatively changed the lexical composition of their texts in Russian language, enriched grammatical structure of texts, so they are quite ready to create complex genres of journalism style. As a genre assignment, they are invited to present a text for a local newspaper as an interview with a director of the theatre performance. The students prepare a feature article on “the Russian province from the point of view of American students”, and design it as a newspaper or magazine article do to its genre-forming and genre-defining features (Barabash, 2010; Ukhova, 2012b; Repina et al., 2018).

Thus, the elective e-course “Written speech” is designed to expand the knowledge and skills of online-working with texts of different functional styles repertoire obtained during the basic courses. It should be noted that the Russian education has a fundamental difference from the American one, in the sense that it is more traditional and often represents the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student. In the United States, teaching is more focused on group forms of education and are based on discussion. The use of the case-technology, thus, allows bringing together fundamentally different teaching methods and obtain a high-quality limit of educational result, which is understood as a set of cognitive, motivational, and operational results that have maximum performance in each paradigm. The remote application of this method opens new opportunities for students to interact online and study in the new conditions of the educational process in the era of coronavirus.

First, the trainees continue to use the table “Functional styles of the modern Russian literary language”, where the following information is contained about the journalism style:

- 1) Sphere of communication: social and political communication.
- 2) Speech situation: official situation, mass addressee, the author’s task (to inform and influence).
- 3) Style features: documentary, authenticity, emotionality, invocability (Babenko, 1989; Izard, 1999; Stepanov, 2014).
- 4) Vocabulary: socio-political terminology; words denoting proper names; words with an abstract meaning; vocabulary and phraseology related to the area of moral and ethical problems (duty, honor, conscience, moral principles); words having an

evaluative character, positive and negative (social worker-parasite, advocate-helper); outdated forms of words (sons, knees, people); vocabulary and phraseology of the most different layers: legacy, solemnly raised (the flag, the Fatherland, the hour), conversational and colloquial (specifics, hype, crowd), figurative language tools.

5) Morphology: numerals, proper name, word structure with suffixes -ity, -ets, -jeni, -ist, -ism; with prefixes anti-, arch-, super -, ...; the plural of nouns having a collective meaning (election); compound adjectives, participle; imperative verb forms; quantitatively-nominal combination (2 days).

6) Syntax: diverse offerings, often exclamation motive nature, rhetorical questions, rhetorical appeals; introductory words, involved and adverbial-participial turnovers; inversion; elliptical constructions, stylistic figures, and citations.

Due to the materials of the table, students first analyze samples of newspaper-journalism style texts focused on the analysis deliberately selected original texts, united by thematic dominant (language, language and society, culture of speech) trying to isolate the language features characteristic of this style of speech. Then a complex genre-style analysis of texts of different stylistic orientation is carried out, during which the regularities of the creation of texts marked by different speech situations are distinguished. Below are options for such tasks.

Assignment 1.

Read a sample of the text designed for a newspaper and answer the questions after the text.

Sample questions to the text:

* What are the characteristic features of the style of the text?

- What is the purpose (task) of the author of the text?
- What language features would you highlight in this text?

Assignment 2.

Read two texts and complete the tasks after the texts.

Sample questions and tasks:

1. Where and in what sphere of communication can this text be used?
2. Determine the components of the speech situation (situation, destination, author's problem)?
3. What are the stylistic features of both texts?
4. Select the main features of the language of both texts.
5. What genre and style type do the texts belong to?

As for the journalism style is characterized by a large variety of lexical means, it is of particular importance in the training of foreign language students to create a written speech utterance, mark the communication situation, acquire lexical and grammar exercises aimed at identifying literal and metaphorical meanings of words, building synonymic and antonymic units. Of course, this kind of job cause the greatest difficulties for trainees, so the use of dictionaries is required. Below are the options for assignment.

Assignment 3.

Describe the value (literal or figurative) of the highlighted word and find synonyms (where possible) and then antonyms (where possible) of the selected words.

Assignment 4.

Come up with sentences with each of several synonyms and explain the difference (semantic or stylistic) between synonyms.

Assignment 5.

Find in the poem given means of expression, for what purpose does the author use them in his poem?

Only after that, the genre experiments might be launched.

Assignment 6.

According to the basic words “culture – man – language – society” create a statement in the style of journalism (10-15 sentences).

The role game “The interview with the director of a theatre performance” (Ukhova, 2012a; Zheltukhina et al., 2017).

Within the e-course “Writing” students are offered the following case:

1. Visit the performance of the theater named after F. Volkov online, prepare questions for the director of the theatre performance, selecting a genre type of interview, conduct an interview, record it.
2. Decipher the record, transfer it into a written form, issue in the form of an article designed for a newspaper or magazine, invent a catchy title, heading, 2-3 frames, select the photos.

The didactic materials designed for this unit contain the following information.

1) Interview is a conversation of journalist with a person highly competent in a certain area of human activity, for the purpose of receiving new, exclusive information, valuable discussing socio-political, economic, moral, and ethical and other problems.

2) Types of interviews:

Event interview is focused on a situation in a life of a famous person, organization, or state.

A portrait interview almost always concerns someone’s biography and include several types as follows:

A leitmotif, when the interlocutor helps to approach a specific topic and not drop.

A narrative, when the interlocutor is first asked to tell the story of his life in chronological order.

An open, when a journalist plays the role of “curious listener” and asks only leading questions.

A problem, which is focused on important issues of politics, economy, social order, the journalist asks direct questions and requires the same direct answers.

The students readily incorporate in the role game “Interview with the director of the theatre performance”, as a rule, choose the genre of event interview. Noting the difficulties in understanding the storylines of a theatrical production, difficulty in deciphering an interview and creating a complete text, students, however, note the need to use this method in the preparation of texts of journalism style, because they act as journalists.

The role game “The training problem”.

Within the e-course “Writing” students are offered the following case:

1. In accordance with the proposed by the teacher topic “Russian province seen by American students” identify the problem to be analyzed.
2. Come up with a text that might be presented by a journalist.
3. In accordance with the policy of the publication, determine the vector of the representation of the problem.
4. Write an article corresponding to the genre-forming and genre-defining parameters of the problem-solving text, choose strong arguments and bring them into the system.
5. Write the text in the form of an article designed for a newspaper or magazine, come up with a title, heading, 2-3 frames, select the photos (if necessary).

The didactic materials designed for this unit contain the following information.

1) An article is a journalism genre of a text aimed at representing a socially relevant problem, event, or person. The article expresses openly or understate certain author's

position. It must include quotations, statistical and illustrative material. The text structure is as follows: thesis – argumentation – conclusion.

2) Argumentation is the process of bringing evidence, explanations, examples to justify any thought.

3) The thesis is the main idea, which the speaker tries to justify.

4) Argument is the evidence given in support of the thesis; it displays information of “because”. The optimal number of arguments for the proof of the thesis is three.

5) Strong arguments include facts (what is proven, accurate, reliable), statistics, references to authorities (laws, documents; expert opinions, eyewitnesses; statements of famous personalities).

Conclusion

Let us sum up stated above. We identified one of the most effective educational technologies in the process of teaching communication disciplines in the era of coronavirus. It was a case-study.

The online-way the students broaden their real journalism practice brings a high-quality result, because they “try on” the role of professional journalists, make a very responsible and conscientious approach to the creation of a written statement designed in the frame of a certain genre and style. The latter also concerns the problem statement for discussion such as “about Russian soul, Russian character, Russian cuisine, cultural features, temples, transport, sports/fans, theater/audience, cinema, etc.” in the era of coronavirus, and which is especially valuable, linguistic, and stylistic embodiment of the conceived idea.

In the final questionnaire, students note that by preparing their classes online they significantly enriched their vocabulary, developed, and improved the skills of writing a text of a certain genre in Russian, which confirms the need for this course in the system of training of foreigners in general. Almost all students note the case-technology not only as an interesting and creative, but what is most important, as a necessary form of education in general and of e-learning foreign languages in particular. In the e-courses of training and during the presentation of genre assignments it is possible to demonstrate the new knowledge and skills gained during the training in the virtual reality, and identify problems often associated with insufficient practical experience of online-interaction.

As a conclusion, it should be underlined that the role of the teacher when using the case-technology in distance education in the era of coronavirus is very multifaceted and the teacher leads the roles of a creator, designer, consultant, and expert, and, finally, a direct participant in a role game online giving maximum freedom to the students for their self-realization.

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