

## Conference Paper

# Spiritual (Including Folklore) Culture As a Tool for Teaching the Russian Language in a Multicultural Environment: Practical Experience

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## Abstract

The article discusses the issues of improving the methodology of teaching the Russian language and the effectiveness of teaching the Russian language in a multicultural environment with the inclusion of elements of spiritual culture (including folklore) in educational institutions (humanitarian gymnasiums, high schools and institutions of higher education) of the Republic of Mari El. The authors demonstrate differences in the use of folklore in the main (class, out-of-class and out-of-school) activities of the experimental network institutions (Federal Institute for the Development of Education, Moscow) and the training workshop ('Prosveshchenie' Publishing House). It is concluded that projects aimed at socio-cultural adaptation, successful socialization and enculturation of Russian youth are of great importance from different angles, including the issue of harmonizing interpersonal and intercultural relations in modern Russian society. The authors' experience (E. A. Plotnikova, M. N. Pirogova) in introducing certain units of Russian traditional culture into the study of the Russian language by foreign students also had certain positive reviews. It is obvious that at the initial stage of training, students should receive a certain linguistic minimum, including knowledge of the country's culture, traditions, features of verbal and non-verbal communication, etc. Application of innovative educational technologies, including quests and competitions, gives good results in this case.

**Keywords:** multicultural environment, spiritual culture, folklore culture, teaching the Russian language

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## 1. Introduction

The processes of integration, globalization and expansion of areas of intercultural relations are very important in the modern multicultural and multilingual world. They affect practically all spheres of human activity, including economics, politics, as well the social, cultural, spiritual and domestic spheres of life. Under these conditions, all multilingual nations and nationalities in one way or another interact with each other.

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Therefore, communication difficulties may result due to the language barrier, cultural characteristics and worldview differences. Nowadays, the problem of overcoming the language barrier in the modern multilingual world, as well as the problems of intercultural education, improving the status of the Russian language, improving the methodology of teaching the Russian language, the effectiveness of teaching children the Russian as a foreign language, the training of migrants, etc., receive close attention of scientists and general public.

Most modern researchers consider bilingualism ('the alternating use of two languages'; in the Russian Federation it is Russian and the language of a national minority in a certain region [1]) an effective way to overcome the language barrier. The famous scientist K. Z. Zakiryanov draws attention to the specifics of this phenomenon, due to the joint coexistence of multilingual nationalities [2], [3]. I. V. Shcheglova, in turn, not only comprehensively considers aspects of the study of the phenomenon of "national Russian bilingualism", but also determines the geographical scope of its study [4].

In our opinion, the development of a new look at the problem of interethnic cooperation in modern conditions, as well as the creation of appropriate educational programs that correspond to the age characteristics of students (primary, secondary and high school students; college and university students) are relevant tasks of the humanities. The Russian language contributes to the mutual cultural and spiritual enrichment of the nationalities of the Russian Federation; accordingly, the study of the Russian language is inseparable from acquaintance with the spiritual culture of the Russian people: "the language embodies both a national character and a national idea, and national values; the latter forms of the latter can be represented in the traditional symbols of this culture" [5, 15]. It is easy to see that many problems associated with this topic require additional consideration, despite the universalism and versatility of studies and research on the issue.

The purpose of this article is to familiarize the reader with the experience of scientists and education specialists of the Mari El Republic in the field of teaching the Russian language to students and schoolchildren of various ethnic and age groups with the involvement of elements of spiritual culture (including folklore).

## 2. Teaching the Russian Language to Primary School Students Using Elements of Spiritual Culture (Including Folklore)

The Federal Institute for Educational Development (FIED, Moscow) has created a network of experimental institutions in the Republic of Mari El (2011–2017). This, in our opinion, is one of the promising ways to familiarize primary school students with the spiritual culture of the Russian people. The network includes both higher education institutions (Mari State University) and high schools (The Blue Bird Humanitarian Gymnasium named after Ishtrikova T. V., André Malraux Gymnasium No. 26, Korkatovo Lyceum, Yoshkar-Ola School No.6, Yurino School after S. A. Losev). The research topics are: "Development of a system of spiritual and moral education of primary school students on the basis of the value potential of traditional folk culture" (2011) and "Development of a system of patriotic civic education of primary school students of the Mari El Republic on the basis of the value potential of traditional folk culture" (2015). The organization of the experimental work was also caused by the need for a wider use of valuable cultural assets of Russians, Mari and representatives of other nationalities of the Mari El Republic in the process of education, development and upbringing of the younger generation [6, 259–260].

The aim of the project is to create the conditions for the pedagogical influence of the basic elements of the traditional culture of nationalities of the republic on the formation of the civic identity of urban and rural schoolchildren based on the general philosophical principle of "Unity in Diversity" (K. Leontyev, N. Danilevsky, L. Gumilev) [6, 259]. This principle involves the use of national cultural values of representatives of all nationalities in a particular educational group/community in the process of their upbringing and education. In other words, if Russians, Mari, Tatars, etc. study together, materials from cultures of all these nationalities will be included in the content of the lesson or any other form of class or extra-curricular activity. In our opinion, this principle combines the content of several subjects of primary school and, thus, can serve as the basis for immersing students in the present and past of the Russian culture with the possibility of transition to the realm of world culture through dialogue between cultures.

For almost a decade, participants in the experiment have been comparing different eras and cultures of Russia and other countries in order to find common aspects in life of nationalities, ethical and moral problems, and basic humanistic values in all this diversity. They did this both during class and outside class/outside school. Firstly, some topics were covered in the classrooms using textbooks, workbooks, digital applications and

additional materials related to the traditions of the nationalities of the Mari El Republic. After that, they were extended to extracurricular activities. Also, the work in sections and studios of additional education was introduced, and family visits to local history and outdoor museums were organized. In addition, considerable efforts were made to summarize and exchange the experience of the participants of the experiment through scientific publications, online platforms on social networks, master classes and seminars, as well as the All-Russian school seminar "Unity in Diversity: Traditional (Folk) Culture and Problems of Education in the Regions of Russia" (Yoshkar-Ola, 2016). Our successful efforts to implement this principle have attracted the attention of the academic and educational community of the Russian Federation. As a result, an online educational seminar (based on 'Prosveshchenie' Publishing House, 2018--2021) was created.

It should be noted that the functioning of the pilot projects and the training workshop was carried out in accordance with the existing training and education programs of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation. All programs recommended for use in educational institutions of the Russian Federation include the study of oral folklore. Accordingly, authors of manuals created in accordance with these programs include analysis and study of various genres of folklore (proverbs, sayings, riddles, 'zaklichkas' (short ritual appeals, sometimes rhymed), fairy tales, historical songs, calendar of ritual poetry) and some information on the theory, history and evolution of folklore in lesson plans. This is not accidental: the use of folklore not only promotes the development of patriotism among native speakers of the Russian language, but can also help in appreciating cultural and mental values that students learn for whom Russian is not their native language. At the same time, folklore improves the clarity, expressiveness and literacy of students' speech. However, A. Yu. Nikitchenkov and some other researchers emphasize the differences between folklore and fiction and stress the need to develop special methods of analysis and interpretation of folklore [7]. But students often deal with adaptations of folklore texts, and the whole range of genres of oral folklore genres is not represented in the school curriculum.

In the aforementioned projects, these issues are addressed: for example, both traditional folklore and the modern urban folklore were used in the educational process (for example, initiation rites in modern subcultural communities, as well as modern urban mythology and children's folklore). Examples of a wide variety of verbal texts were also given in the context of the study of ritual complexes. It should be noted that ethnographic descriptions and texts were taken from the best collections. They were accompanied by comments of prominent folklore specialists. The folklore texts of the nationalities of the Mari El Republic were taken from the collections of Mari State University.

We believe that one of the important tasks in studying the Russian language is to acquire the correct phonetics. Violation of orthoepic norms leads to difficulties in understanding speech in general. Lack of proper pronunciation skills makes speech understanding impossible. Habits for listening and pronunciation are at the heart of all types of conversational activities, so the issues of pronunciation training are vital in the context of learning the Russian language. The use of certain folk genres (such as proverbs, sayings, tongue twisters and rhymes in the playground) helps to improve pronunciation skills. The reading out of these texts leads to the correction of articulation, pronunciation of sound, phrasal accent and speech rhythm. This fact shows the feasibility of their use in phonetic warm-up. It is appropriate to draw attention to the accuracy of reading: students should be provided with a reading pattern that complies with the norms of orthoepism (that is, the text should be pronounced correctly). The practical work of our team included not only reading of folklore texts by educational specialists or reproduction of their original performances, but also an invitation to the participants of the folk ensemble 'Tsarev gorod' (Tsar City). The basic principles of this ensemble are an in-depth study of the structure and content of folk art, the use of original ethnographic sources (field recordings of folklore and communication with those who practice traditions) and special attention to the peculiarities of poetics. At the same time, the use of folklore texts in the context of phonetic warming-up is an example of live speech containing information about the culture and way of life of people.

The phonetic aspect of the inclusion of folklore in the practice of teaching the Russian language is closely related to the lexical one, since proverbs, sayings, riddles, 'zaklichkas', etc., contribute to mastery and expansion of the vocabulary of students. Folklore texts contain new words and phrases. Before students can use them in their speech, they have to learn them and determine their lexical meaning and collocation. The vocabulary, which is already familiar to students, can be represented here in a new contextual meaning, which also contributes to its activation in students' speech and subsequent enrichment of speech. Folklore texts are also rich in proper names (in most cases, these are anthroponyms that classify or characterize a character: *Ivan the Peasant's Son*, *the Unsmiling Tsarevna*, *Pokatigoroshek* et al.) and place-names (*Lake Ilmen*, *Karacharovo*, *Kiev-grad*). They not only expand students' vocabulary, but also expand the horizons of primary school students. It should be noted that folklore texts can be very vivid and rich in language means used. They may contain various linguistic phenomena that are not characteristic of professional fiction. In this regard, the excessive use of epithets and synonymic repetitions (*volia vol'naia* ('a free freedom'), *temnitsa temnaia* ('a dark dungeon'), *toska toskuchaia* ('an anguished anguish'), *vek*

*vekovat'* ('to live out the life'), *dumu dumat'* ('to think about thoughts'), *griazi topuchie* ('a muddy marsh'), *znaiu-vedaiu* ('I know, I'm aware'), *otets-batiushka* ('father the begetter')) is especially noteworthy, as this emphasizes the general meanings of certain words. Explanatory epithets also cultivate children's imagination (*estvushka sakharnaia* (sugary viands), *dvor shirokii* (a wide yard), *stol belodubovyi* (a white oak table), *mlad-sizoi orel* (a young blue-gray eagle), *bel-goriuch kamen'* (a burning white stone)). They are formed by highlighting the most significant features of an object, phenomenon, action or feeling. In some cases, this feature (which is often presented in the minds of people as the most important or even the only one) is included in the aesthetic system of the worldview of the nation and is tied to traditions, legends and reiterations.

The inclusion of 'Arts and Crafts' contests, quizzes, game programs, theater performances, excursions, expeditions and projects in the educational process and extracurricular activities is another effective way to draw students' attention to traditional (folk) culture. These forms of activity contribute to a better understanding of linguistic expressive mediums and people's thinking.

Online contests have proved to be an effective way of learning the Russian language with the involvement of the elements of the Russian traditional (folk) culture. For example, the participants of the experimental network platform developed tasks for the All-Russian school competition in the Russian traditional (folk) culture "Recall the Name of Yours" (state registration certificate No. 2018665148) under the federal purpose program "Russian Language" (2016--2020). The main goal was to expand and deepen understanding by modern young people of the origins, essence and nature of the Russian traditional culture; of its values and connections with the world and domestic literature; of the fundamental elements of the Russian national character and the national ideal which were reflected both at the material and spiritual levels in folk architecture, ethno-cultural works, lifestyle, philosophy, art and spoken word. The scientific and methodological significance of the project consisted in determining the substantial boundaries of the competition tasks, implementing its interdisciplinary nature, identifying the optimal correlation between traditional and creative tasks, including new information technologies, in particular game elements (in competition tasks for primary school students).

The interdisciplinary nature of the project is highlighted: its tasks include issues related to the lifestyle of the Russian people (ethnographic aspect), folk architecture and crafts (cultural aspect), language (ethnolinguistic aspect) and oral folk tradition (folkloristic aspect).

The competition tasks were divided into four sections: 1. Culturological tasks were aimed at recognizing and differentiating objects of folk architecture, folk crafts and musical instruments (in the form of image files on gadget displays). 2. Ethnographic tasks were aimed at recognizing and differentiating between objects and the reality of the peasant lifestyle, including examples of oral folk tradition (in the form of image files on gadget displays). 3. Ethnolinguistic tasks were associated with the study of the linguistic component of traditional culture. They were aimed at determining the etymology of the names of practical and everyday objects, folk terms and names (in the form of written exercises). 4. Folkloristic tasks were presented in the form of detailed texts intended to determine the genres and methods that underlie certain texts or genres of folklore. 5. Creative tasks (for example, students must fill in the gaps in the folklore text of a certain genre with appropriate drawings or symbols (emoji game) or select traditional fairy tale formulas from the list and arrange them in the correct order to recreate a popular fairy tale plot, etc). The full range of folklore texts was used in the competition tasks, including those reflecting religious ideas (Russian spiritual poems and legends).

The tasks were organized in three levels: level 1 (competition tasks for primary school students, grades 2--4); level 2 (competition tasks for high school students, grades 5--9) and level 3 (competition tasks for high school students, grades 10--11). Every level included tasks from all four sections (cultural, ethnographic, ethnolinguistic and folkloristic). The first three sections consisted of five tasks in each, and the last section was presented in the form of a test (9--15 questions).

The fact that the system of competition tasks created by the project participants had an educational function is very important. After completing the competition section, the participant received not only the correct answers, but also detailed explanatory notes. For example, in a culturological section, the task was set to ask the contestants the following question: 'Which of the toys in the picture brings happiness according to popular belief?' After the task, there was a column 'Let's learn more!', containing a detailed explanation. In these tasks, the principle of continuity was also observed: each type of task was presented as a set of units with an increasing level of complexity.

### **3. Teaching the Russian Language to Foreign Students Using Elements of Spiritual Culture (Including Folklore)**

A large influx of foreign students to Russian institutes of higher education has undoubtedly increased the status and relevance of the Russian language. Foreign students live

in Russia but study in English. The ability to understand Russian speech and speak Russian has become a necessity for them, especially in small towns with a low level of English-speaking people. In our opinion, one of the effective ways to increase the effectiveness of foreign students studying the Russian language is to introduce gaming technologies into the educational process. The concept of gaming technology includes a fairly wide range of ways and methods of organizing the educational process in the form of various auxiliary games.

There is no doubt that foreign students studying in the Russian Federation should be familiar with the minimum in the field of linguistic and cultural studies, including the culture, traditions and distinctive features of verbal and non-verbal communication practiced in this country, holidays celebrated in Russia, etc. The use of various educational technologies can accelerate the process of cultural exchange. Technology quests and competitions can be attributed to the number of the most suitable in this regard.

For example, the concept of the regional competition "Recall the Name of Yours", developed by a group of specialists led by Prof. T. A. Zolotova and already mentioned above, certainly introduces students to the Russian culture and its traditions. In this regard, it can be useful not only for foreign students with a level of B1 language proficiency, but also for those who begin to study the Russian language and culture. The illustrations represent a broad topic of the Russian traditional culture. They give students the correct guidelines and ensure their understanding of the lifestyle, history and traditions of the Russian people.

Interactive quests based on folklore materials can also be considered as a means of immersion in the Russian culture. Quest technology has recently become a widely used technique in the educational process. E. A. Igumnova and I. V. Radetskaya define the quest as "an integrated technology that combines the ideas of the project method, problem education and edutainment, teamwork and the use of IT" [8]. To complete the quest, the participants in the game must solve a certain problem [9]: find an artifact (object, book, text) or an answer to a question (key to a cipher), to achieve a new status (expert), etc. At the same time, participants form a team project of a route movement and jointly solve different educational problems, obtaining the opportunity to independently solve educational problems. In other words, a quest is a systematic algorithm for solving educational problems presented in the form of a game. The quest as a teaching method is widely used in the process of teaching both the natural sciences and the humanities. At the initial stage of learning the Russian language, the quest helps students obtain teamwork and independent work skills, as well as provides practical knowledge of the Russian culture and improves the speech aspect at the initial level. Finally, the quest



can awaken the everyday life skills acquired by students in the process of immersion in the Russian cultural life. A linguistic quest was held at Mari State University. First-year medical students from India participated in this project [see also: 10]. Teachers of the Russian language developed this linguistic quest game on the basis of the Russian fairy tale "Kolobok". The game consisted of two stages: introductory and practical. To begin with, students were offered to watch the cartoon "Kolobok in a new way" in Russian with teachers' comments. While watching the cartoon, students got acquainted with the plot, which formed the basis of the quest, and also completed the listening task. After that, all students were divided into five predefined groups supported by volunteers (who were also foreign university students with a higher level of the Russian language proficiency). Volunteers visited teams between locations and met with them at locations. At every location, there was a unique task aimed at testing the students' proficiency in various norms of the Russian language, for example Task 1: "Continue the Word Chain". The team leader calls the noun. Other team members should continue the word chain. Each word should begin with the last letter of the previous one (*slovo -- okno -- oval -- lyzhi...*). Each team was given five minutes for this task, and their goal was to name as many words as possible, for example Task 2: "Solve the riddle". Each team had ten minutes to solve five riddles. Students had auxiliary images of the objects that were described in the riddles, for example Task 3: "Karaoke". Participants were to sing (like in karaoke) any single verse (by choice) and a refrain from the song "Smile" from the cartoon "Little Raccoon" (music by V. Shainsky, lyrics by M. Plyatskovsky). Team members and their instructor read the lyrics of the song and its translation. Illustrations with the key words from the lyrics were displayed on the blackboard in the classroom. The team that sang the song more concurrently and correctly from the point of view of articulation won. The maximum time available for this task was fifteen minutes. Task 4: "Russian Food". The participants were to choose the ingredients for "cooking borsch" from the available assortment of "food products" (toys). The winning team gathered all the necessary products faster than the rest. The maximum time available for this task was ten minutes. Task 5: "Describe the character of the 'Kolobok' Fairy Tale". Each team was to 'characterize' the animal characters from 'Kolobok'. Participants were given randomized cards with adjectives. They were to distribute these adjectives among the animals. The team that "described" a larger number of characters (correctly matched the adjectives and the animals) won. The maximum time available for this task was ten minutes. The final Task 6: "Meeting the Fox". The participants had to demonstrate their communicative skills. They were to make up a 'spontaneous' dialogue using their verbal and non-verbal communication skills.

For each task, the teams received not only points, but also letters. At the end of the quest, they were to make up a keyword using these letters: *prianik* (a spice-cake). It was a bonus prize for the quest completion, a kind of reward from Kolobok as a gratitude for saving him. The correct keyword provided an opportunity to meet the educational goal and obtain the main artifact of the quest: Kolobok who had been rescued from the Fox. For each task, teams received up to 10 points. The score depended on two parameters: the accuracy and speed of the task completion. The points were given by the teachers in charge of each location. The final scoring was carried out by a team of quest organizers. According to organizers and participants, the linguistic quest based on the Russian folktale 'Kolobok' was a lively and dynamic intellectual event. This helped to develop cohesion and unity of representatives of different nationalities. Thus, the quest can be considered an effective learning technology when working with foreign students. These students are motivated by the form of the activity itself, as well as the desire to win the competition, get approval, demonstrate their knowledge and complete the task as soon as possible. The advantage of using this technique is that the very form of work organization enhances students' independent thinking and, undoubtedly, increases their motivation for learning, which, in turn, helps perpetuate the further desire of foreign students to learn Russian.

## 4. Results and Discussions

In December 2018, an online competition "Recall the Name of Yours" was held in all schools participating in the experimental network platform. In total, about 600 students took part in this project. Analysis of the results of the competition showed that most students completed the tasks. Participants were able to put theoretical knowledge into practice; they had the skills to deal with folklore texts. The largest number of winners was identified among primary school students. This is due to the two-year participation of students in the work of the federal experimental platform "Development of a system of patriotic civic education of primary school students of the Republic of Mari El on the basis of the value potential of traditional folk culture". The maximum number of points is 30. The average score is 21.12.

In the course of the task completion, the students managed to demonstrate not only their knowledge in the field of the traditional culture, but also their level of IT competence as a prerequisite for the implementation of the Federal educational standards (all participants did the competition tasks on PCs).

Both students and their tutors showed keen interest in this type of educational activity. They praised the content of the tasks, their interdisciplinary focus and creative nature.

As for the study of the Russian language by foreign students with the involvement of elements of spiritual culture (including folklore), the experience shows that one of the ways to improve the effectiveness of training is the introduction of gaming technologies in the educational process. This type of technology includes a rather wide range of ways and methods of organizing the educational process. "Pedagogical game" always implies a clear goal and the expected result, which are indicated clearly or indirectly and are characterized by a cognitive and educational bias [11]. Game methods and situations in this case serve as a means of stimulation and motivation for learning. There is no doubt that, as D. V. Riazantseva rightly noted, a Russian language lesson for foreign students "is not just a game. The trusting and unconstrained character of the communication between the teacher and students is built thanks to the gaming atmosphere and games as such. All this leads to serious conversations and discussion of any real life situations" [12]. During the game, cognitive activity of students develops in the context of language learning. The reasonable use of gaming techniques at the lessons of the Russian language for foreign students and their combination with other methodological practices contributes to an effective and high-quality understanding of the linguistic material.

## 5. Conclusion

This article discusses the issues of the improving the methodology of teaching the Russian language and the effectiveness of teaching the Russian language in a multicultural environment with the inclusion of elements of spiritual culture (including folklore) in educational institutions (humanitarian gymnasiums, high schools and institutions of higher education) of the Republic of Mari El. For example, the experience of using traditional cultural materials in teaching primary school students seems quite interesting. The authors demonstrated differences in the use of folklore in the main activities (class and extracurricular) of the experimental network institutions (Federal Institute for the Development of Education, Moscow) and the training workshop ("Prosveshchenie" Publishing House). It is already noteworthy that the work of the experimental network platforms of the Federal Institute for the Development of Education (Moscow) in the Republic of Mari El and its final stage (organization of an online competition) led to certain positive developments in the worldview of both Russian children and representatives of other nationalities in the context of understanding several important

traditions of the Russian culture that are vividly represented in folk architecture, crafts and language, as well as classical and modern folklore. Such projects aimed at socio-cultural adaptation, successful socialization and enculturation of Russian youth are of great importance from different perspectives, including the issue of harmonization of interpersonal and intercultural relations in the modern Russian society.

The authors' experience (E. A. Plotnikova, M. N. Pirogova) in introducing certain units of Russian traditional culture into the study of the Russian language by foreign students also had certain positive reviews. It is obvious that at the initial stage of training, students should receive a certain linguistic minimum, including knowledge of the country's culture, traditions, features of verbal and non-verbal communication, etc. Application of innovative educational technologies, including quests and competitions, gives good results in this case.

At the same time, the introduction of gaming technologies in the lessons of the Russian language for foreign students serves as a diagnostic tool for teachers. These technologies make it easy to identify the most difficult parts in the material, assess the degree of its understanding, and at the same time, do students' activities at a creative level and their daily work on mastering phonetics, grammar, vocabulary, etc. much more interesting and entertaining.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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