

## THEORY AND METHODS OF TEACHING RUSSIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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### “A curiosity that I want to discover for myself...”: the Russian language as perceived by the citizens of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea

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**Importance.** The current problem of the Russian language perception by citizens of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea is examined. The familiarity level of Equatorial Guineans with the Russian language and culture, as well as their willingness to study Russian as a foreign language, is analyzed. The purpose of the study is to use a questionnaire to analyze the peculiarities of the Russian language perception by residents of Equatorial Guinea, as well as to identify ways to overcome possible difficulties in the study of Russian as a foreign language by Equatorial Guineans at the initial stage.

**Materials and Methods.** The results of a survey conducted among of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea residents, which made it possible to formulate recommendations for teaching Equatorial Guineans the Russian language and forming a positive image of Russia as a great power in students, are presented. The respondents included 9 men and 17 women aged 19 to 28.

**Results.** The study identified the motives of the Republic of Equatorial Guineacitizens to study Russian. The survey showed a high interest level in learning foreign languages, including Russian, as well as a positive attitude towards the Russian Federation, but at the same time revealed an almost complete absence of associations with Russian culture among the respondents. 100 % of respondents consider it necessary to study Russian, as it will help in their professional activities. At the same time, 19 % of respondents do not have Russian culture knowledge, which proves the need for its further popularization. Although 69 % of respondents consider Russian difficult to learn, they show a high willingness to learn it.

**Conclusions.** The theoretical value of the obtained results is due to the fact that the study allowed to identify the main perception features of the Russian language by residents of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea who began to study it. Both the questionnaire created by the authors and the recommendations for teaching Russian to Equatoguineans developed on the survey basis is of practical importance.

**Keywords:** Russian language, Russian culture, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, teaching Russian as a foreign language, questionnaire, perception of Russia

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## ТЕОРИЯ И МЕТОДИКА ОБУЧЕНИЯ РУССКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ КАК ИНОСТРАННОМУ

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### «Диковина, которую я хочу открыть для себя...»: русский язык в восприятии граждан Республики Экваториальная Гвинея

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**Актуальность.** Рассмотрена актуальная проблема восприятия русского языка гражданами Республики Экваториальная Гвинея. Был подвергнут анализу уровень знакомства экваториальцев с русским языком и культурой, а также их готовности изучать русский как иностранный. Цель исследования – с помощью анкетирования подвергнуть анализу особенности восприятия жителями Экваториальной Гвинеи русского языка, а также обозначить пути преодоления возможных трудностей в изучении экваториальцами русского языка как иностранного на начальном этапе.

**Материалы и методы.** Приведены результаты анкетирования, проведенного среди жителей Республики Экваториальная Гвинея и позволившего сформулировать рекомендации по обучению экваториальцев русскому языку и формированию у обучающихся позитивного образа России как великой державы. В число респондентов вошли 9 мужчин и 17 женщин в возрасте от 19 до 28 лет.

**Результаты.** В ходе исследования были выявлены мотивы граждан Республики Экваториальная Гвинея изучать русский язык. Анкетирование показало высокий уровень заинтересованности в изучении иностранных языков, в том числе русского, а также положительное отношение к Российской Федерации, однако позволило вместе с тем выявить почти полное отсутствие у респондентов ассоциаций, связанных с русской культурой. 100 % опрошенных считают необходимым изучать русский язык, поскольку это поможет в их профессиональной деятельности. При этом 19 % респондентов не имеют знаний о русской культуре, что доказывает необходимость ее дальнейшей популяризации. Хотя 69 % респондентов считают русский язык трудным для изучения, они проявляют высокую готовность к его изучению.

**Выводы.** Теоретическая ценность полученных результатов обусловлена тем, что исследование позволило выявить основные особенности восприятия русского языка жителями Республики Экваториальная Гвинея, которые приступили к его изучению. Практическую значимость представляют как созданная авторами анкета, так и разработанные на основе проведенного анкетирования рекомендации по обучению экваториальцев русскому языку.

**Ключевые слова:** русский язык, русская культура, Республика Экваториальная Гвинея, преподавание русского как иностранного, анкетирование, восприятие России

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## IMPORTANCE

At present, more and more Asian and African countries are seeking productive cooperation with Russia in the field of economy, culture, science, education, which, according to researchers, in the long term can contribute to the sustainable development of our country [1]. However, a mutually beneficial dialog between our countries is possible only if Russian specialists thoroughly study the main features of life in African countries, which is the subject of a number of works by modern scientists. For

example, T.S. Denisova analyzed in details “the peculiarities of socio-political development and evolution of political and economic development in Republic of Equatorial Guinea” [2, p. 9]. K.A. Kameneva studied the tourist potential of Cameroon, which “allows it to really summarize many characteristics of the continent, as a result of which some people call it Africa in miniature” [3, p. 622]. G.M. Kostyunina studies the integration processes on the African continent, which began “back in the colonial period” [4, p. 35]. O.V. Konstantinova describes in detail the peculiarities of integration pro-

cesses in Central Africa [5, p. 48], which, due to political instability, are going "very slowly" [6, p. 23]. V.N. Shitov analyzes the possibilities of economic integration in Central Africa, which "are being developed in modern conditions within the framework of two existing interstate unions in the subregion – the Economic Community of Central African States and the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa" [7, p. 57]. M.V. Ledeneva and T.A. Plaksunova study the prospects of economic development of a number of African countries located in the "least industrialized region of the world" [8, p. 129]. Finally, E. Tokarev analyzes the possibilities of using "soft power" in Africa [9, p. 192].

The state of Equatorial Guinea is of particular interest in the current situation. This state, which for centuries was under the power and influence of Spain, for a long time was not included in the zone of interests of our country and remained poorly studied. Now, however, there is a large number of works by domestic scientists who analyze the possibility of ensuring sustainable partnership relations between Russia and the Republic of Equatorial Guinea. For example, V.O. Dubinin describes the education system in Equatorial Guinea, whose citizens "are trained in the Russian Federation, for example, at the Military Institute of Physical Culture" [10, p. 154]. I.A.N.M. Ana addresses the analysis of relations between the Republic of Equatorial Guinea and the Russian Federation and their prospects [11, p. 55]. A.A. Boltaevsky and A.A. Yarina trace "the difficult historical path made by a young country" – the Republic of Equatorial Guinea – and conclude that the large oil fields of this country will attract more and more players on the world stage [12, p. 3]. The analysis of the economic situation in the Republic is presented in the works of

V. Gusarov and L.N. Kalinichenko, who see the main obstacle to economic development of the country in "the attitude of the employees of already built plants and factories and currently under construction enterprises to work and fulfill their professional duties" [13, p. 52], and A.I. Tope, drawing attention to the "demographic problems of the country" [14, p. 84]. V.M. Shelyuto studies the consequences of Spain's colonial policy in Equatorial Guinea, including those related to the activities of the Catholic Church [15, p. 175].

At present in this country, which earlier, as studies show, was in the zone of stable influence of the West, a special center has been created in which the study of the Russian language is possible. There is a high demand for teaching the Russian language to the equatoguineans, that is why in the domestic science there have recently appeared works in which the prerequisites of studying Russian culture by the inhabitants of the Republic are investigated and the methods of teaching them Russian as a foreign language are substantiated. Thus, I.Y. Kotova investigates the possibilities of using the language cultural component of teaching Equatoguineans Russian as a foreign language on the example of the manual "Walking around Moscow" by V.G. Kasarova and L.S. Kremenetskaya [16, p. 273], and O.S. Shurupova and N.A. Sushkova describe "the main tasks and prerequisites for teaching the Russian language to the residents of the Republic" [17, p. 1501]. At this stage, there is a need to provide the educational process in Russian with specific materials, in this regard, the study of the peculiarities of perception of the Russian language by Equatoguineans, which will allow to choose the best methods and techniques of teaching and correct possible errors, is of particular relevance.

The aim of the study is to analyze the peculiarities of Equatorial Guineans' perception of the Russian language and to identify ways to overcome possible difficulties in learning Russian as a foreign language by equatoguineans at the initial stage.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the process of this work, a questionnaire survey was conducted among 26 students of the Russian language center opened in Malabo. In order to find out the peculiarities of the perception of the Russian language by Equatoguineans who do not yet know Russian at a level sufficient for understanding complex questions and answering them competently, the authors developed a questionnaire in Spanish. The respondents included 9 men and 17 women between the ages of 19 and 28. 15 were students at the National University of Equatorial Guinea, 4 were pursuing professional education and/or working, and 7 were currently engaged only in Russian language study. In the course of studying the data obtained during the questionnaire survey, a systematic approach was used, as well as general scientific methods of analysis and synthesis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first part of the questionnaire was devoted to the study of the attitude of Equatoguineans to foreign languages. For the majority of respondents, Spanish is their native language (88 %), 12 % speak Fang. All native Spanish speakers noted their own high proficiency in it, while Fang speakers admitted that they rarely need to use their native language to communicate, and this leads to the fact that they experience certain difficulties communicating in their seemingly native language.

Since it is compulsory for residents of the Republic to study foreign languages at school, all respondents studied at least one foreign language (French – 38 %, English – 8 %, English and French – 54%). However, the results of learning were not always satisfactory: 27 % of respondents admitted that they still do not know any foreign language, 58 % speak French, 27 % – English, and one person each speak Fang and Bubi as foreign languages. At the same time, absolutely all respondents are interested in foreign languages and believe that learning another language is necessary in the modern world. Arguing their point of view, they noted that the possession of foreign languages “allows communicating with representatives of other cultures expands professional opportunities, enriches personal experience”. According to the majority of respondents, “language is a tool that unites people from different countries and promotes cooperation, which is especially important in the context of globalization”. When asked why respondents want to study a foreign language, the following answers were received (some of the respondents gave several reasons at the same time):

- want to easily communicate and establish friendly relations with people from other countries – 42 %;
- want to understand the mentality of other people, the differences between us and learn to exist in harmony – 8 %;
- want to learn new culture, new customs broaden my horizons – 27 %;
- want to improve my abilities, raise my professional level, and get new experience – 31 %;
- want to find a better job – 27 %;
- want to work as a translator – 8 %;
- want to contribute to the development of my country – 4 %;

– it is necessary for studying – 4 %.

Two of them found it difficult to formulate a specific reason and are studying the language “just in case”, hoping that it will “come in handy in the future”. It is interesting that when answering the next question of the questionnaire: “Will knowledge of the Russian language help you in your professional activity?” all respondents gave an affirmative answer. – all respondents answered in the affirmative. It should be assumed that the main motivation for learning a foreign language by the citizens of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea is the possibility of professional growth and, as a result, the improvement of their financial situation, as well as the possibility of acquiring new knowledge, expanding their horizons and social circle. In this regard, the Russian language has chances to gain popularity in this country and become one of the most studied foreign languages.

The second part of the questionnaire contained questions that were supposed to help find out the attitude of Equatoguineans to Russian culture. All respondents indicated that they were interested in Russian culture. In describing their associations with the concepts of Russian language and culture, most respondents spoke of “the richness of literature, folk music, dance, architecture, and fascinating history.” Interestingly, several people noted that “Russia's language and culture broadcast the idea of integration and cultural diversity, while preserving national characteristics.” For residents of a country whose population consists of several ethnic groups, this attitude is of great importance. In addition, several respondents attributed knowledge of Russian to the possibility of helping cooperation between the two states.

When asked why the Respondents decided to study Russian, one stated, “Russian

language and culture is a curiosity that I want to discover.” For most residents of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea who know little about Russia, the Russian language is indeed a “curiosity,” but it is important that they are quite ready to get acquainted with a new and rather complex language system. It is necessary to support this desire to “discover” Russian language and culture.

The fact that many respondents reported personal acquaintance with students who studied in our country seems very favorable for the spread of the Russian language in Equatorial Guinea. They told the respondents a lot about their impressions of life in Russia. These respondents, who have acquaintances who were educated in the Russian Federation, want to follow their example and believe that knowledge of Russian will help them to obtain a quality higher education. 12 % of respondents stated that their interest in Russia is explained by the appearance of the Center in Malabo, where they now have the opportunity to get acquainted with Russian culture. They are motivated to study Russian language and culture by active communication with teachers from Russia. It seems that the personality of the teacher who teaches the Equatoguineans the Russian language can also play a significant role in its popularization.

It can be emphasized that in addition to the prestige of the Russian language, which opens access to quality education, the factor that influenced the choice of the Russian language was its aesthetic qualities. About 10 % of respondents study this language because they found it beautiful. Its melody and complexity became an additional reason to learn Russian.

However, 19 % of the respondents, despite learning Russian, could not articulate the reasons why they chose this language and did not reveal any knowledge of Rus-

sian culture. This shows that it is necessary to carry out further systematic work to popularize the Russian language.

The answers to the question "Do you know any famous Russian writers/poets?" were not very diverse. Although 73 % gave an affirmative answer, not all of them could recall specific names. The majority of respondents named A.S. Pushkin (42 %), some of them even remembered the dates of his life and emphasized his importance for Russian literature. Other names included M.Yu. Lermontov (8 %), N.V. Gogol (8 %), and A.P. Chekhov (4 %). It is surprising that one person cited Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich as an example. Perhaps he read some literature about the life and tragic death of this Moscow governor-general, which made a strong impression on him. Unfortunately, none of the respondents named either F.M. Dostoevsky or L.N. Tolstoy, who are the most popular Russian writers among foreigners. Apparently, the country's residents do not know Russian literature very deeply, the treasures of which could be revealed to them if they were proficient in the Russian language. If Europeans are motivated to learn Russian by the desire to read great Russian books in the original, it is different in the case of Equatoguineans.

Ecuatoguineans do not expect that communication with representatives of another country and culture will be easy. Among the perceived difficulties they name: lack of knowledge of the language (62 %), with some talking about specific language aspects (grammar – 8 %; writing, professional terms, jargonisms – 8 %; pronunciation, fluency – 12 %). 15 % think that problems may arise due to ignorance of customs, social norms and cultures. One respondent admitted that it would be difficult for him to establish first contact with new people.

All respondents have already started learning Russian. Therefore, they have already formed a certain opinion about its difficulty. 69 % find Russian difficult to learn because it is very different from their native language. 12 % think that Russian is not very difficult for those who are motivated to learn it and have time to work on themselves. 15 % admitted that they have no difficulties at all in learning Russian.

The answers to the question: "What topics would you like to discuss in Russian?" are very diverse. – are characterized by great diversity. The most frequently mentioned topics were "Culture and way of life in Russia, Russian literature" (15 %), "Society" (8 %), "Health, medicine, public health" (8 %), "Climate, global changes" (8 %) and "Nutrition" (8 %). Other answers were: "Diplomatic relations", "Racism", "Religion", "History", "Learning foreign languages", "Business world", "Personnel management", "Finance and accounting", "Telecommunications", "Technology", "Electricity", "Sports", "Beauty", "Dance". Thus, the residents of the Republic are interested in the culture and lifestyle of Russian people. It can be assumed that such a variety of answers testifies not only to the wide range of interests of young Equatoguineans, but also to the fact that they consider learning Russian useful for further studies and professional career.

One of the questions of the questionnaire was related to the favorite type of activity in the process of learning Russian. As it turned out, different types of activities can be used at Russian language lessons. Thus, 8 % of respondents stated that they like all kinds of tasks. The overwhelming majority of respondents (77 %) like to read and translate texts in Russian, 65 % like to perform written tasks, 58 % like to answer questions from the teacher, and 54 % like to listen to

texts. Active language activities are less favored by the Equatoguinean audience: 42 % want to express their opinion on a certain topic, 38 % want to retell texts, and 27 % want to participate in discussions of current topics.

This attitude towards learning a foreign language can be explained by existing practices in the education system of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea. Learning material at school usually consists of copying and repeating the material after the teacher. As a result, students are not ready or able to express their own opinions or create original texts. This feature should be taken into account in the process of working on comprehension tasks, gradually increasing their complexity and offering students supports that they can use, creating first small and then larger statements in Russian.

All respondents are willing to devote a significant amount of time to learning Russian. Only 8 % said that 3 lessons a week is enough for them, 15 % prefer to attend lessons 4 times a week. Half of the respondents are ready to study 5 times a week, taking a break on weekends. 15 % believe that daily work is necessary for effective results. Such enthusiasm for learning Russian inspires optimism and hope for successful results. At the moment the Russian language is not taught in schools and universities of the Republic. It is thought that it would be expedient to introduce a course of Russian language at the level of basic secondary education, high school, as well as one of the disciplines of higher education, at least as an optional discipline.

Since there is a lack of professional Russian language teachers in the Republic, the last question of the questionnaire was: "How do you feel about studying Russian online?". The overwhelming majority of respondents (92 %) consider this type of

learning unacceptable for them. In their opinion, online learning is less effective because learners perceive information worse. Equatoguineans prefer personal communication and the opportunity to interact in a group, they believe that such work contributes to individual and collective development. Only 8 % are ready to study online, but they note that such work will take more time to achieve results. The Russian language is quite difficult to learn, so at the initial stage it is necessary to prepare the students for painstaking work on studying the system of sounds, letters, grammatical phenomena, which is complex and new for Equatoguineans. It is important to form in students a moral readiness to learn complex rules of grammar and large blocks of unfamiliar vocabulary. An important role here can be played by a professional teacher who will not only explain complex linguistic phenomena, but will also be able to interest and inspire students. Special attention should be paid to the Cyrillic alphabet, which is completely unfamiliar to most potential learners in Equatorial Guinea. It should be compared in detail with the Latin alphabet, pointing out the similarities and differences between the individual letters. A series of exercises can then be used to have learners write their names and the names of their home towns and villages in the Cyrillic alphabet. It is important to offer students to read first Russian names and the names of Russian cities where they might like to visit, and then short texts. For example, you could first ask students to read captions to pictures of animals, plants, and cultural monuments of Russia, then signs and short advertisements in Russian, then short sayings of Russian writers and quotations from their works, etc.

The system of sounds of the Russian language may also seem difficult for Equatoguineans.

toaguineans to master, and at the initial stage systematic work on the pronunciation of individual sounds and sound combinations typical of the Russian phonetic system is necessary. Each lesson at the initial stage can begin with a phonetic warm-up, having identified by experience the most difficult for Equatoguineans combinations of Russian sounds and saying these combinations aloud.

Citizens of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea can be introduced to the cultural heritage of the language they are studying by using short Russian proverbs and sayings, which can serve as illustrative material in lessons. Of particular importance in this plan is the comparative aspect, which allows foreign students to comprehend the similarities and differences in Russian and native culture. Such learning gives students the opportunity not only to understand the culture of the target language, but also to realize the value and originality of their own culture.

## CONCLUSION

The questionnaire showed that indigenous languages in the Republic of Equatorial Guinea have been virtually supplanted by Spanish, French and English. Until recently, careers were possible only for those Equatoguineans who spoke Spanish. However, there is now a favorable situation for Equatoguineans to learn Russian. It is important that Russia has never hindered the development of national languages and cultures, which means that it will retain respect and cherish the culture of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea. It is ready to act as a worthy partner that respects the culture of Equatorial Guinea. It is important that the inhabitants of the Republic realize that the study of the Russian language, connected with a friendly

and powerful state, attractive for partnership relations, can provide them and their families with a successful future.

The Russian language in the future can become one of the foreign languages offered for study in Equatoguinean schools and universities, the knowledge of which will provide an opportunity to receive a high-quality education, necessary for a good career. During further study of the Russian language, it is important to use passages from Russian literature for reading, especially since the survey has shown that Equatoguineans are eager to read texts in Russian. It seems that at the initial stage of acquaintance with the Russian language, excerpts from the works of A.S. Pushkin, whose personality may be of particular interest to the Equatoguineans due to the fact that the ancestor of the great Russian writer was of African origin, can serve as a teaching material. Texts dedicated to Russia's great people can also be a source of knowledge about Russian culture. By learning more about great Russian writers, artists, musicians, military leaders, etc., equatoguineans will be motivated to learn more about the language and culture of the country where such people lived and worked.

Now there is every chance that partnership relations, including scientific and cultural exchange and mutually beneficial cooperation, will develop between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Equatorial Guinea. Further formation of a scientific and theoretical basis for the promotion of the Russian language and the expansion of the Russian cultural and educational space in this state can help to ensure such interaction.

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