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DEVELOPMENT OF INTERACTIVE DIGITAL MATERIALS FOR LEARNERS OF RUSSIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This article explores methodological and practical approaches to developing interactive digital materials for learners of Russian as a Foreign Language (RFL). Based on authentic teaching practice with international students from diverse cultural backgrounds, the study presents a series of real-life examples demonstrating how interactivity, scenario-based learning, and cultural adaptation enhance language acquisition. The article argues that interactive materials are most effective when they include multimodal input, authentic contexts, and opportunities for autonomous practice and feedback. The teacher's role evolves into that of a learning environment designer, while learners engage actively and safely with the language. The findings highlight the importance of flexibility, personalization, and cultural sensitivity in digital RFL course design. Recommendations for further development and implementation of such resources are also provided.

Keywords

Russian as a Foreign Language (RFL), interactive learning, digital materials, scenario-based tasks, blended education, language pedagogy, cultural adaptation, e-learning, instructional design, multimodal input.

Introduction

Modern methodologies in teaching Russian as a Foreign Language (RFL) are undergoing significant transformation amidst the rise of digital educational technologies. With the expansion of distance and blended learning formats, the role of digital instructional content has become central. However, simple digital replication of printed textbooks proves insufficient: today's learners need not only information but also interaction with the learning environment, feedback, adaptability to their pace, and cultural context. In this regard, interactivity should

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be understood not merely as the presence of buttons or animations, but rather as a meaningful scenario-based interaction where the learner participates actively, makes decisions, and receives feedback [1, p. 45]. The relevance of this topic is driven not only by pandemic-induced changes in education but also by the growing global interest in learning Russian for professional, humanitarian, or cultural purposes. Developing interactive digital materials helps address several pedagogical challenges simultaneously: overcoming language barriers, increasing motivation, and building communicative competence in authentic contexts. Nevertheless, several open questions remain: What should an effective digital RFL resource look like? What components enhance its pedagogical impact? How can we account for learners' cultural backgrounds, learning preferences, and perceptual styles?

This study aims to describe methodological approaches to the design of interactive electronic materials for RFL students, provide illustrative examples from practice, analyze pedagogical effects, and identify the main challenges teachers face during development and implementation.

Materials and Methods

The study draws upon the author's practical experience in designing and implementing interactive RFL modules for international students from China, Turkey, Egypt, and Eastern Europe, enrolled in a technical university. The materials were developed using platforms such as Moodle, iSpring Suite, H5P, and LearningApps. Particular emphasis was placed on tasks simulating real-life communicative situations—completing a migration form, visiting a doctor, applying for university admission, buying train tickets, or chatting in a messenger.

The methodology involved classroom observation during the use of these modules, collection of student feedback (both oral and written), and analysis of learner difficulties and responses. Instead of quantitative metrics, the study prioritized qualitative data—student reactions, engagement levels, typical mistakes, and preferences. In addition, publicly available RFL resources—such as the digital catalog of Moscow State University and international language teaching courses on platforms like Coursera and FutureLearn—were reviewed to compare design principles and user experience.

Results

The development of interactive tasks began with identifying students' specific needs. In one A2-level group composed of Turkish students, a short survey revealed the following challenges: "understanding spoken Russian" (63%), "formulating spoken responses" (54%), "grammatical endings" (49%), and "fear of

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making mistakes" (70%). Based on this input, modules were designed to foster student participation in safe, low-stress speaking environments.

For instance, in the assignment "Visiting the Clinic," learners watched a short video of a patient and doctor dialogue. Then, the student had to choose a role and continue the conversation. Depending on their input, the scenario would unfold differently. If the learner made a grammar mistake or responded inappropriately, the character would reply: "I didn't understand. Could you repeat, please?" This caused amusement among students but also encouraged them to reflect on their speech. One student commented, "For the first time, I felt like I was really speaking Russian—not just filling in blanks."

Another example is the "Job Interview" simulation, where students had to adapt their language register based on the formality of the situation. If they addressed the interviewer informally using "ты," the character's facial expression would change and respond: "Are you sure that's appropriate for an interview?" This type of situational training proved highly effective in building both linguistic and intercultural competence [2, p. 108]. Assignments that mirrored the students' digital realities generated particular interest. For example, in the task "Chat with a Dormitory Neighbor," learners interacted with a simulated messaging interface, receiving texts and composing appropriate responses. Some even began adding emojis and stickers—unprompted by the task—indicating deep engagement. Moreover, several learners started reusing expressions from the module in real conversations, such as: "Sorry, I can't today. Let's meet tomorrow," taken from the unit on scheduling meetings.

These tasks were especially helpful in reducing speaking anxiety. One student from China shared, "I'm afraid to speak in class—I don't want to make mistakes. But in these tasks, it's safe—I can try again." In this way, interactivity created a space for safe language practice [3, p. 90]. Moodle modules also included grammar and vocabulary blocks. In the unit "Cases in Context," learners completed comics by inserting correct grammatical forms into speech bubbles. In another task, "At the Store," students helped a customer choose items from a shopping list written in the genitive case. If an incorrect form was selected, the program offered a gentle comment like: "What if you were looking for *tomatoes*?"

Notably, the implementation of such materials required a rethinking of the teacher's role. The instructor becomes not only a knowledge provider but a designer of learning environments. Teachers act as facilitators guiding students along personalized learning paths. During course planning, they must consider technical issues—mobile responsiveness, load speed, offline availability, and interface intuitiveness.

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Discussion

Interactive digital materials allow instructors to move beyond traditional lecture-based models and create environments where learners are active participants rather than passive recipients. The above examples show that even simple technological tools can become powerful pedagogical assets. First, scenario-based tasks with multiple pathways encourage learner agency. The student controls the flow of conversation, makes choices, encounters consequences—this brings the learning experience closer to real communication. These tasks are particularly valuable for students who struggle with speaking: they offer practice in a safe, feedback-rich setting [4, p. 74]. Second, multimodality (video + text + visuals) enhances memory retention. For example, in the unit "At the Store," combining product images with names facilitated vocabulary acquisition. However, excessive multimedia can cause cognitive overload. Therefore, balance is essential. A student from Egypt remarked, "When video, text, and sound are all happening at once, it's hard to know what to focus on." Third, interactive materials can be culturally sensitive. Chinese learners appreciated seeing character-based transcriptions during early lessons, while Turkish students preferred voice-input dialogues. Thus, resources should be flexible, adaptable, and inclusive of diverse learning styles and cultural expectations. Some learners need more control; others need more autonomy. Digital tools provide unique opportunities for such personalization [5, p. 121].

Conclusion

Creating interactive digital materials for RFL is a complex task requiring not only technical proficiency but also an understanding of pedagogy and learner psychology. An effective course is more than a collection of exercises—it is a carefully designed environment where the learner feels engaged and empowered. Incorporating real-life contexts, variability in responses, instant feedback, and cultural elements transforms learning into a meaningful and motivating process.

Practical examples suggest that even with limited resources, impactful digital modules can be developed when instructors apply methodical design and empathic insight. Teachers become not just course developers, but cultural mediators and mentors in the digital learning space.

Looking ahead, future developments may include open-access libraries of interactive templates, shared repositories of dialogue scenarios, AI-supported speech assessment, and greater focus on advanced (C1–C2) and professionally oriented Russian language instruction.

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