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The selection of methods in the contemporary teaching of Russian as a foreign language

Extended summary

Despite claims about the outdatedness of teaching methods during the 1990s, contemporary practice of foreign language teaching shows that the concept of methodology has remained a relevant pedagogical framework. The aim of this research is to examine the extent to which the principles of four historically significant methods – grammar-translation, direct, audiolingual, and communicative – are present in the contemporary instruction of Russian as a foreign language in Serbia. Instead of searching for the “best” method, the focus is on identifying individual principles and the way in which they are combined in teaching practice. To address this aim, a questionnaire-based survey was conducted among 35 Russian language teachers working in primary and secondary schools across Serbia. The questionnaire was designed to examine indirectly, through specific teaching activities, the frequency with which key principles of the mentioned methods are applied in the classroom, using a five-point Likert scale.

The findings show that the audiolingual method is the most consistently and frequently applied one. It recorded the highest mean score ($M=3.80$), lowest standard deviation ($SD=0.76$), and highest minimum score ($Min=2$). Notably, 66% of teachers reported using its principles “often” or “very often,” while only 3% responded “rarely,” and none selected “never.” These results suggest that the principles of the audiolingual method – especially repetition, imitation, and behaviorist learning techniques – remain deeply embedded in practice. This also supports the notion of the teacher as a model whose speech and behavior students emulate.

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The direct method also shows a high frequency of use, though with a slightly greater variability in responses ($SD=1.05$). With a mean of $M=3.69$ and a median of 4, the use of this method also falls within the “frequent” category (3.50–4.29). 63% of respondents reported frequent or very frequent use, while 14% indicated rare or no use. These findings suggest that the direct method is commonly applied, with some variation, and that teacher-led instruction continues to dominate. Error correction emerged as a particularly prominent activity associated with this method. Further research might examine which types of errors (e.g., phonological, grammatical, and syntactic) are most frequently corrected and which strategies are used for correction.

The grammar-translation method recorded a slightly lower mean ($M=3.43$) and the highest standard deviation ($SD=1.12$), indicating divided opinions among the respondents. While 57% reported frequent or very frequent use, a notable 23% indicated rare or no use. Although the average is close to the “frequent” category, the relatively high standard deviation suggests variability in its implementation. The median score of 4 supports the interpretation that, overall, the method remains present in practice. The continued reliance on deductive grammar instruction, translation exercises, and a traditional teacher-student dynamic appears to be particularly prevalent among more experienced educators.

In contrast, the communicative method recorded the lowest mean ($M=2.29$) and median (2), as well as the highest percentage of “never” and “rarely” responses (60%). No respondents reported using it “very often.” These results point to a minimal presence of communicative principles in practice. Consequently, Russian language teachers are rarely positioned as facilitators of learning, and communicative activities such as games or group work are largely absent from the classroom.

The study also examined the relationship between teaching experience and the frequency of method use. A weak positive correlation ($r=0.37$) was found between teaching experience and the use of grammar-translation method principles. This suggests that more experienced teachers are somewhat more likely to rely on traditional, form-focused instruction, possibly due to entrenched habits or the influence of their initial teacher education.

In conclusion, these findings highlight the eclectic nature of the current methodological practices in teaching Russian as a foreign language in Serbia. While the principles from various methods are integrated into instruction, there remains a strong tendency toward traditional approaches, particularly those emphasizing repetition, teacher authority, and grammatical accuracy. The results underscore the need for an ongoing professional development to support the adoption of the more communicative, learner-centered teaching practices that align with contemporary pedagogical standards.

Keywords: Russian as a foreign language, grammar-translation method, direct method, audiolingual method, communicative method

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