

TEACHING THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE TO INDIAN MEDICAL STUDENTS: ETHICAL CHALLENGES FACED BY A TEACHER OF RUSSIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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The article explores the ethical issues arising when teaching Russian as a Foreign Language (RFL) to medical students from India at Russian medical universities. The issues of intercultural communication, ethical training, medical ethics concepts for foreign medical students, and ethical challenges faced by a RFL teacher in a diverse classroom are reviewed. The role of language standards, language mediation, and associated moral and ethical challenges is shown. The ways to solve these ethical issues based on scientific literature and teaching practice at Yaroslavl State Medical University are suggested.

Keywords: Russian as a foreign language (RFL), medical education, students from India, professional ethics, deontology, intercultural communication, language mediation

Author contribution: Suryaninova JA, Bernhardt OV — analysis and synthesis of literature related to the topic, generalization of pedagogical experience, preparation of the text of the article.

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ОБУЧЕНИЕ РУССКОМУ ЯЗЫКУ СТУДЕНТОВ-МЕДИКОВ ИЗ ИНДИИ: ЭТИЧЕСКИЕ ДИЛЕММЫ ПРЕПОДАВАТЕЛЯ РКИ

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Статья посвящена анализу этических аспектов преподавания русского языка как иностранного (РКИ) студентам-медикам из Индии в российских медицинских вузах. Рассматриваются проблемы межкультурной коммуникации, деонтологического воспитания, формирования представлений о профессиональной этике будущих врачей у иностранных студентов, а также этические дилеммы, возникающие в деятельности преподавателя РКИ в поликультурной образовательной среде. Анализируется роль языкового стандарта, языкового посредничества и сопряженные с этим этические трудности. На основе анализа научной литературы и педагогической практики в рамках ЯГМУ предлагаются пути решения выявленных этических проблем.

Ключевые слова: русский язык как иностранный (РКИ), медицинское образование, студенты из Индии, профессиональная этика, деонтология, межкультурная коммуникация, языковое посредничество

Вклад авторов: Ю. А. Сурьянинова, О. В. Бернгардт — анализ и синтез литературы по теме, обобщение педагогического опыта, подготовка текста статьи.

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Teaching foreign medical students at Russian universities plays a key role in international educational cooperation. According to media sources, India remains a major provider of medical students for Russian universities. This trend exists because being a doctor means holding high social status in India. Students from India study in several Russian universities such as Sechenov University, Orenburg State Medical University, Omsk State Medical University, Krasnoyarsk State Medical University named after Professor Voyno-Yasenetsky, Samara State Medical University and similar institutions that frequently provide training in English.

Students from India face many challenges in their education. These problems involve the language barrier and deep cultural differences, including the ones seen in the academic environment. Studies show that Indian students stay very close

to their home culture while they study. They struggle language interference and difficulties associated with the daily ways of life in Russia.

In these circumstances, the ethical aspects of teaching Russian as a foreign language are of particular importance. Teaching Russian plays a primary role among all subjects in shaping the character of a future doctor, building good moral values, and growing their creative skills. However, this study is important because science literature does not fully discuss the ethics of teaching RFL to medical students in India.

Teaching foreign medical students in Russia is part of the global market for education services. Export of medical education services also means the need to think carefully about important moral and ethical questions. In this context, the RFL teacher does not only teach a language, but also

acts as a representative of the Russian education system for foreign students. Unethical actions like discrimination or cultural insensitivity can harm both the reputation of a specific University and the Russian medical education overall.

The article aims to identify and classify the ethical issues that arise when teaching Russian as a foreign language to medical students from India, and to develop helpful solutions.

THE INTERCULTURAL ASPECT OF THE ETHICS OF TEACHING RFL

Teaching Russian to Indian medical students involves bridging a wide cultural and mental gap between Russia and India. According to the theory of pedagogics, top-quality education requires moral growth. This growth builds a person who can accept spiritual, moral, social, and family values. However, the very process of translating these values faces ethical obstacles.

A Russian as a Foreign Language (RFL) teacher at a medical university does not only speak the native language, but also acts as a bridge for the culture and values of the Russian society. According to Abramova MV, Russian as a foreign language teachers talk to people from other cultures all the time. They know from real experience that teaching works best when you respect the unique culture and language habits of your students [1]. Understanding backgrounds and native languages of foreign students helps teachers prevent mistakes in both organization of the teaching process and cross-cultural communication.

Indian and Russian value systems also differ. It means that teachers need strong intercultural competence. Teaching methods must rely on competence-based and profession-oriented higher education. They should also use a linguistic and cultural approach that unites language, regional, cultural and semiotic, as well as axiological skills [2].

Indian students adapt to the new language and culture while building an attitude of being tolerant to others. Using materials in RFL classes that let students compare Russian and Indian cultures is very important here. The Student Scientific Society (SSS) at Yaroslavl State Medical University (YSMU) engages with international students, including those from India.

Students write reports to study Russian, English, and Hindi medical idioms containing words like “doctor”, “treat”, and “medicine”. They compare doctor-patient conversations in different languages and study where cultural and linguistic differences cause gaps in understanding. All this helps Indian students join the educational process and Russian academic environment in general.

A study of scientific literature on RFL in medicine reveals a lack of information about communication ethics. This creates problems when students who have not acquired the appropriate skills in language classes may not be ready for professional communication with Russian-speaking patients, which inevitably leads to communication failures and even conflict situations in clinical practice.

In this regard, one of the key tasks of teaching Russian to medical students is the development of their professional ethics and deontological competence. As Lashova SN points out, medical students have their own unique deontological competence. The competence is a key part of their future medical activity, which cannot be fully successful without this core value [3].

RFL classes provide unique opportunities for fostering medical ethics. Integrating audio and video recordings into doctor-patient communication training resolves ethical issues. It helps Indian medical students understand Russian healthcare realities and compare them with modern practices in India.

Good patient care requires doctors to respect each person's unique background, culture, and personal values. International medical students must learn Russian grammar and words. They also need to choose the right language style for different medical talks and social situations.

ETHICAL DILEMMAS FACED BY RFL TEACHERS

An RFL teacher at a medical university faces unique ethical challenges. To solve the issues, both strong professional skills and deep personal character are required. The language standard is one of the most significant issues. In RFL teaching, the “language standard” is considered as a baseline model, which is used by teachers and in educational materials as a guide.

The dilemma exists as English, which is formally a bridge language for Indian students, does not represent a single standard in reality. “Indian English” [4] is a unique dialect, which differs significantly from the British or American styles that Russian English teachers are usually familiar with. “Indian English” is a fixed form of the English language with its own steady sound and grammar rules. When Indian medical students are taught the Russian language, English is used as a bridge. A RFL teacher should decide how to deal with the specific features of “Indian English” while teaching Russian without making learners feel that their native communication style is “inadequate” or “deficient”. The issue of language mediation is closely connected with the dilemma. Students often do not possess sufficient knowledge both of English and Russian. Teachers then have to make a difficult choice. They can keep teaching in Russian to follow the official plan or they can change the materials to make them easier. This second choice often goes against the rules of the curriculum.

Another problem is that even the “good” English of an Indian student is strongly influenced by the phonetic systems of the native languages [4]. Indian students commonly do not distinguish between the sounds [s] and [sh], and they can't pronounce the sounds [kh], [shch], and [ts] properly [5]. Students from India face additional pronunciation challenges because Latin and Cyrillic letters look alike. For instance, they often pronounce the Russian letter “a” like the English sounds [æ] or [ə]. Similar difficulties arise while pronouncing Russian letters “e” and “y”. As Hindi lacks phonemes [y], [zh], and [ts], speakers often make numerous pronunciation mistakes [6].

Recognizing this issue means that Russian language teachers must take a balanced view of the bridge language. They can no longer rely solely on British or American English as the global standard. Otherwise, such practice creates a risk that students whose language competence does not meet this standard may be perceived as poorly prepared, which creates a feeling of linguistic inferiority. Thus, the teacher may have to adapt to the specific features of Indian English as an independent language style and teach based on their true language skills. Mind, however, that this kind of action can lower the need for language study. If we ignore this issue, many Indian students will not understand key explanations, comparisons, and analogies.

Here, comparing the native language and the target language can become one of the best solutions for teaching RFL. It allows to implement to principle of awareness [1]. Even though Indian students might find this answer very clear, it still requires looking at three different things at the same time. First, Russian and Indian English are compared. Next, the student's first language, such as Hindi, Tamil, or Bengali, is brought into the study. This methodological task is complex

as the teacher needs to know the Russian language alongside with phonetics and grammar of several language systems. Research shows that teachers should use an intermediary language and a nationally focused method (ethnomethodology) when teaching Russian as a cultural or target language to Indian students. This approach helps address their specific ethnopsychological traits [7].

Other key challenges for an RFL teacher involve student testing and how lessons affect learning. Teachers face the ethical challenge of grading fairly and objectively when managing classrooms with mixed language abilities and different student motivation. The challenge of pedagogical effects comes from the core idea that a RFL teacher must both teach students and shape their character. The ethics of how much teachers should guide adult students from other cultures is still being debated. Researchers note that Indian students are seriously motivated to choose a medical profession, but this does not automatically mean that they accept the medical values and ethical rules used in Russia [8].

LANGUAGE MEDIATION: EXTENT AND LIMITS

Using English as a third language to explain Russian material creates a problem of language mediation, which is very similar to the issue of choosing a language standard. The dilemma lies in determining the extent and boundaries of using the intermediary language and raises the question of when and to what extent its use is justified, and when it begins to be an obstacle for studying the Russian language.

A bridge language is definitely indispensable at the initial stage of language learning. It performs numerous important functions, allows to compare language phenomena and overcome interference [9]. Russian grammar should be taught in comparison with the respective English grammar structures. This is how the students can see similarities (singular or plural nouns) and differences (no gender in English, no articles in Russian) [1].

As students gain stronger language skills, teachers should use the intermediary language less often during RFL classroom activities [9]. Excessive use of English makes students get stuck on translating in their heads. They fail to learn how to think directly in Russian. An artificial language setting is also emerging. It does not match the true conditions of future jobs, specifically talking with Russian-speaking patients. As a result, motivation to learn Russian independently is lost, which affects the quality of language training for foreign medical students.

A RFL teacher may face a number of ethically significant problems as far as language mediation goes. Firstly, the right of students to access education is being violated. If the teacher refuses to use the intermediary language, and students do not understand the explanations in Russian, the training becomes formal and ineffective. Secondly, using an intermediary language in groups where students have different levels of English proficiency creates unequal conditions. Students fluent in English benefit from their knowledge of the bridge language rather than their knowledge of Russian. This brings up doubts about how justified the grading is. Thirdly, an intermediary language is not just a tool but also carries specific cultural meanings. When teachers use English, they unwittingly copy Western educational and cultural models, which may conflict with Indian and Russian cultural values and create a problem of cultural sensitivity. Fourthly, for an RFL teacher, a good knowledge of English becomes a necessary professional skill. However, not all teachers possess strong English skills needed for appropriate language mediation. This makes us question if the teacher is good at their job.

To solve the problems, teachers must closely control how and when students use their native language during each step of learning. It can and must be used at the initial stages of learning. However, at advanced stages, its share should gradually decrease [9]. It is necessary to create national textbooks that take into account the linguistic and cultural characteristics of Indian students. As part of advanced professional training, teachers should also learn the basics of Indian English, the unique sound patterns of major Indian languages, and use of non-translational methods of semantics where possible, so that students do not get used to constantly refer to the intermediary language [9]. Combination of these approaches can increase the effectiveness of studying the Russian language and motivation to study the language.

PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR SOLVING ETHICAL PROBLEMS IN TEACHING RFL

Strategies for solving ethical problems in teaching RFL to medical students from India can be considered in a theoretical pedagogical context based on axiological and linguocultural approaches. In a multicultural classroom, using an axiological approach to teach Russian means purposefully shaping certain values required for the professional future of students. Within RFL courses, this goal is accomplished by analyzing medical ethics scenarios, reviewing professional codes for physicians, and engaging in dialogue regarding the moral aspects of healthcare. Utilizing a linguacultural approach to cultivate professional medical ethics in RFL classrooms involves exploring the paremiological foundations of two cultures. This is achieved by comparing Russian and Indian proverbs and idioms that express cultural attitudes toward health, illness, professional duty, and patient care.

A promising initiative involves designing and implementing a two-semester preparatory course for international medical students entitled "Introduction to Deontology (Linguistic Aspect)." This curriculum covers speech culture, rhetoric, medical business etiquette, and the strategic use of speech in professional communication.

Interactive methods of education are widely used today. Integrating interactive technologies into the deontological training of medical students allows to simulate actual professional scenarios, enabling to develop ethical communication skills within a secure learning environment [10]. Engaging students in role-play exercises, analysis of clinical cases, and discussions on moral dilemmas fosters the development of their ethical competence and their linguistic proficiency.

RFL teachers who work with Indian medical students should develop their intercultural competence. They need to possess a developed intercultural competence that includes the awareness of Indian cultural traits, understanding the Indian mindset and core values, and the capacity to foster intercultural dialogue within the classroom environment [11].

CONCLUSIONS

The findings indicate that teaching Russian as a foreign language to Indian medical students is associated with interconnected ethical dilemmas that demand deliberate and well-considered solutions.

The central challenge lies in the lack of a clearly defined linguistic standard. Since English, used as an intermediary language, is represented not by a single norm, but by a specific "Indian English" with stable phonetic and grammatical features, the teacher has to choose whether to focus on an international

standard (risking to create a feeling of inferiority among students) or to adapt to the real language skills of students (risking to reduce academic requirements). This creates an ethical tension between demanding the quality of education and respecting the linguistic individuality of students.

Language mediation exposes a tension between the necessity of using English to explain complex issues at initial stages and the risk of encouraging mental translation habits, distorting the linguistic environment, and weakening self-directed habits of studying Russian. The availability of education (refusal to use an intermediary language turns education into a formal process), fair assessment (uneven English mastery leads to unequal conditions), cultural sensitivity (adoption of western models) and professional competence of the teacher who is not always proficient in English acquire ethical importance.

Dilemmas of assessment and pedagogical influence make these ethical issues complete. The absence of uniform evaluation criteria in groups of students with varying proficiency levels challenges the objectivity of academic assessment. Simultaneously, while fulfilling a pedagogical role, the teacher encounters the boundaries of acceptable influence over adult

learners from a distinct cultural background, whose values may differ from Russian medical and pedagogical traditions.

The ethical challenges discussed in this article cannot be resolved through a single, standardized algorithm. A flexible, situational approach is required that takes into account the stage of education, the level of training of a particular group, the individual characteristics of students and the real communicative tasks of future professional activity. Carefully regulation of using the intermediary language per stage, creating national educational materials, boosting intercultural skills and language proficiency of teachers, and maximizing direct semantic techniques without translation belong to the key strategies.

The ethical responsibility of a RFL teacher means the ability to find a balance between the academic requirements of the curriculum and the real needs of students, between the formation of professional language skills and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity, between the need for language mediation and the gradual transition to teaching in Russian. Only this balanced methodology can help us achieve effective proficiency in Russian while safeguarding the intrinsic dignity of every student, which remains the paramount ethical principle in a multicultural academic setting.

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