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Обучение русскому языку как иностранному студентов из Республики Ангола

Развитие международных отношений между африканскими странами и Россией, неподдельный интерес африканских государств к международному сотрудничеству в области образования, проблемы изучения русского языка и трудности адаптации африканских студентов к жизни в России определяют актуальность данного исследования. Целью статьи является выявление проблем, с которыми сталкиваются студенты из Республики Ангола при изучении русского языка как иностранного (далее – РКИ), в зависимости от языкового аспекта и аспекта обучения, а также определение возможных путей их решения. В качестве методологической базы был использован комплексный подход, состоящий из методов наблюдения и обобщения педагогического опыта, опроса студентов из Анголы, а также статистических методов анализа данных. Установлено, что проблемы обучения ангольских студентов РКИ связаны с межъязыковой интерференцией, национально-культурными особенностями и их психологическим типом личности. Важную роль в обучении РКИ играет эмоциональная составляющая. Для устранения выявленных сложностей в обучении студентов из Республики Ангола предпочтительно использовать этноориентированный подход с элементами других методологических направлений, а также в дальнейшем выстраивать методологическую модель обучения ангольских (и шире – африканских) студентов РКИ, что становится перспективой настоящего исследования.

Ключевые слова: русский язык как иностранный, этноориентированный подход, методика обучения, анкетирование, адаптация, ангольские студенты

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Teaching Russian as a foreign language to students from the Republic of Angola

The development of international relations between African countries and Russia, the genuine interest of African states in international cooperation in the field of education, problems in the study of the Russian language and the difficulties in adaptation of African students to life in Russia determine the relevance of this article. The purpose of the work is discussing of the problems faced by students from the Republic of Angola in the study of Russian as a foreign language (hereinafter – TRFLs), depending on the aspect of the language and the aspect of learning, and identification of possible solutions. A methodological base was used an integrated approach consisting of methods of observation and generalization of pedagogical experience, a survey of students from Angola, as well as statistical methods of data analysis. It is established that the problems of teaching Angolan TRFL students are related to interlingual intervention, national-cultural characteristics and their psychological personality type. An important role in the study of the TRFL is played by the emotional component. To eliminate the identified learning difficulties, it is preferable to use an ethno-oriented approach with elements of other methodological areas, and also to build a methodological model of teaching Angolan (and more widely African) TRFL students in the future, which becomes the prospect of the present study.

Key words: Russian as a foreign language, ethno-oriented approach, teaching method, survey, adaptation, Angolan students

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Introduction

The current political and economic situation in the world brings to the fore the need for the intensification of international cooperation in many spheres of public life, including education. The Russian Federation has been an active participant in this process.

“Russia, with the beginning of its democratic reforms, has become more active in the European education space by joining the global network of universities, internationalization, harmonization of the curricula of higher education institutions (HEIs), creating prerequisites for mutual recognition of university degrees. It has been continuously developing student and staff academic mobility” [1, p. 166]. The country has been perfecting its system of teaching students from other countries in Russia’s HEIs thus facilitating social and intellectual rapprochement of peoples, and advancing mutual understanding. In this regard, an important role in promoting Russian higher education is played by teaching Russian as a foreign language (TRFL) since most degree programmes in Russia are taught in Russian.

For a student who has come from another country, it is vital to have at least some basic knowledge of Russian to fully integrate into the educational process, to adapt socially and psychologically to the country of study, and more importantly, to be able to communicate in various everyday situations.

Literature Review

Teaching Russian as a foreign language is done differently depending on the level of general education of the student, and the peculiarities of his/her national mentality and culture. Students from European countries, North and South America adapt better to local conditions and learn Russian much faster compared with students from Asian and African countries. For them, the process of learning Russian requires more effort.

In this context, the study of peculiarities of teaching students from African countries is of particular importance for several reasons. Firstly, Russia’s cooperation with African states in the field of education has a long history, and African youth seeks to get an education in Russia since it is considered prestigious in their countries. Secondly, students from African countries find it more difficult to study in Russia compared to students from other countries.

E. Strelchuk, describing the linguistic profile of an African student, rightly points out that “when students from African countries find themselves in an unfamiliar environment, they can hardly adapt to the new linguistic, cultural and education conditions. Therefore, the formation of their personality, primarily their secondary linguistic personality, is done quite differently compared with native speakers of the Russian language” [2, p. 21].

This paper does not address practicalities of running a TRFL course (for instance, applying for a Russian visa, or getting a grant) since they are, generally speaking, identical to those of Portuguese-speaking African students studying in European universities [see 3]. In this article, special attention is paid to the analysis of the problems of TRFL to students from the Republic of Angola.

The choice of this focus group is not accidental. Firstly, international cooperation of Russian universities with HEIs of the Republic of Angola has been developing rapidly since the 1970s. Secondly, unlike students from other countries, Angolan students either start

learning Russian only after their arrival in Russia, or they have some elementary knowledge of English, which means the process of their socialization, training and everyday life in Russia depends on how well and how fast they master Russian. Thirdly, we have gained sufficient experience of teaching TRFL to mono-ethnic groups consisting solely of citizens of the Republic of Angola, starting from pre-university education to master degree programmes.

To date, the Russian methodology of TRFL distinguishes six main areas of research: linguistic, communicative, cultural, anthropocentric (individually oriented), testologic and technological ones [4]. Such a variety of approaches to teaching gives a TRFL teacher a wide choice of methods and techniques for presenting the material that meets the needs of students. Nevertheless, many TRFL teachers try to increase the effectiveness of pedagogical activities and introduce new integrated approaches in their professional work.

The ethno-oriented approach allows the teacher “to identify and take into account difficulties faced by students of different ethnic groups in mastering Russian. It helps to better understand foreign students, to determine the most appropriate forms and methods of teaching a certain ethnic group, to assist them in overcoming psychological barriers and in their adaptation to a new social and cultural environment” [5, p. 237].

Within the framework of this approach, the following research works on linguodidactics were used to identify effective tools for teaching students from the Republic of Angola:

- works on the methodology of teaching Russian as a foreign language [6- 8];
- modern research and methodological works on cognitive studies; communication and problem-based learning [9-12];
- research works on intercultural communication and linguistic studies [13-17];
- games, role-play, audio, video and online technologies in teaching foreign languages [18-22];
- research works on teaching of African [23-29].

To test the effectiveness of the ethno-oriented approach in teaching Angolan students, the following assumptions were made:

1. problems in the development of the Russian language skills by students from the Republic of Angola are related to language interference and the peculiarities of the Portuguese language;
2. teaching Russian is more effective provided the personality type of students is taken into account;
3. the effectiveness of training increases when the chosen teaching methods correlate with the national and cultural characteristics of students;
4. the level of proficiency of the Russian language has a direct impact on the degree of adaptation of Angolan students to life in Russia.

Materials and Methods

The study is based on a comprehensive review of the characteristic features of students from the Republic of Angola, on the one hand, and on our observations and the analysis of the pedagogical experience gained on the other. Observation and feedback are important tools for choosing the most effective teaching methods.

Surveys have proven to be a common and a popular method used by many researchers [30; 31], and teachers of Russian as a foreign language [6], who conducted surveys in order to optimize the teaching process, make it more efficient and interesting for students. So

we opted for this method of research to have an objective picture of the effectiveness of teaching Russian to students from the Republic of Angola.

The survey was carried out in 2017. We interviewed 24 Angolan students aged 23-30 who, at the time of their arrival in Russia, could not speak Russian. Our respondents were the 2d-4th year Bachelor students and the 1st year Master students of Kaliningrad State Technical University. Questions of the survey were of semi-closed (scaled) and open types (see Fig. 1, Fig. 2).

Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 the following activities you have in class:

1. I do not like it at all

5. I like it very much

	1	2	3	4	5
Listening to the teacher's explanations					
Doing exercises					
Reading (separate words, dialogues, texts)					
Writing (separate words, dialogues, texts)					
Discussing a topic					
Watching a film					
Listening to music					
Making up a dialogue					
Participating in a role-play or doing a crossword					
Doing a test					
Asking questions					
Other					

Figure 1 An example of a semi-closed question

13. What topic do you find particularly interesting to discuss

14. Please describe the attitude of Russian students to you

Figure 2 Examples of open questions

Results and discussion

Our research identified the main problems and difficulties encountered by students from the Republic of Angola during their Russian language classes.

Traditionally, teaching Russian to foreign students begins with an introductory phonetics course, during which students become familiar with Russian phonetics and intonation patterns. Due to the fact that Angola is a former Portuguese colony, the official language of this country is Portuguese. Today there are two official dialects of the Portuguese language: European and Brazilian. According to E. Budnik, "in Angola, the Portuguese language <...> is in many ways similar to the Brazilian dialect, although the population still prefers to acquire the modern European version of the Portuguese language. Thus, the phonetic system in

Angolan Portuguese is a transition from Brazilian to the European Portuguese” [32, p.17]. Consequently, difficulties in the pronunciation arise primarily due to phonetic interference - non-differentiation of consonants, in particular [h '], [w], [w'], back-lingual [k], [x], problems with pronouncing [l '], [p], [x'], and combinations with [y '], etc. [32, p. 17]. However, Angolan students have no difficulty imitating Russian intonation patterns. In this regard, the TRFL teacher of Russian phonetics should take into account these language-specific peculiarities already during the introductory course of Russian phonetics.

Obviously, the main difficulty for students from the Republic of Angola is Russian grammar. However, they easily acquire the categories of gender, number, conjugation and tense since these categories exist in Portuguese, though there is some difference (for instance, verbs have 8 simple and 8 complex tense forms, etc.). Angolan students find it hard to identify the gender of Russian nouns (for example, in Russian the word house is masculine, and in Portuguese casa is feminine). The biggest difficulty is the category of case since in Portuguese, nominal parts of speech do not decline. Consequently, when teaching Angolan students the system of Russian cases, the TRFL teacher should focus on the semantic relations that different cases express, and use many illustrative examples. Our survey of Angolan students showed that 50 % of the respondents understand Russian grammar better if the teacher refers to specific every-day situations (Fig. 3).

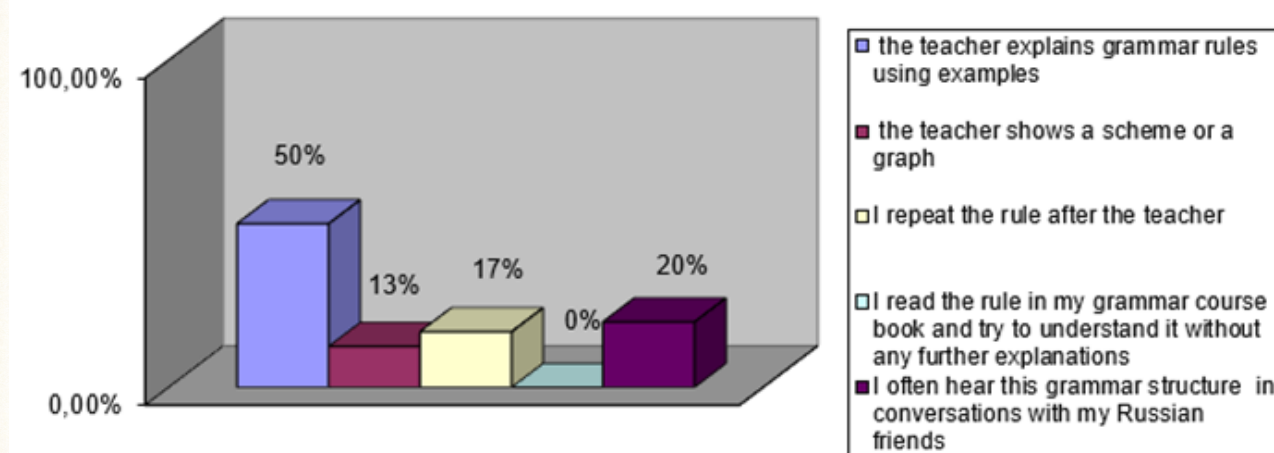


Figure 3 Answers to the question “When it is easier for you to understand Russian grammar rules?”

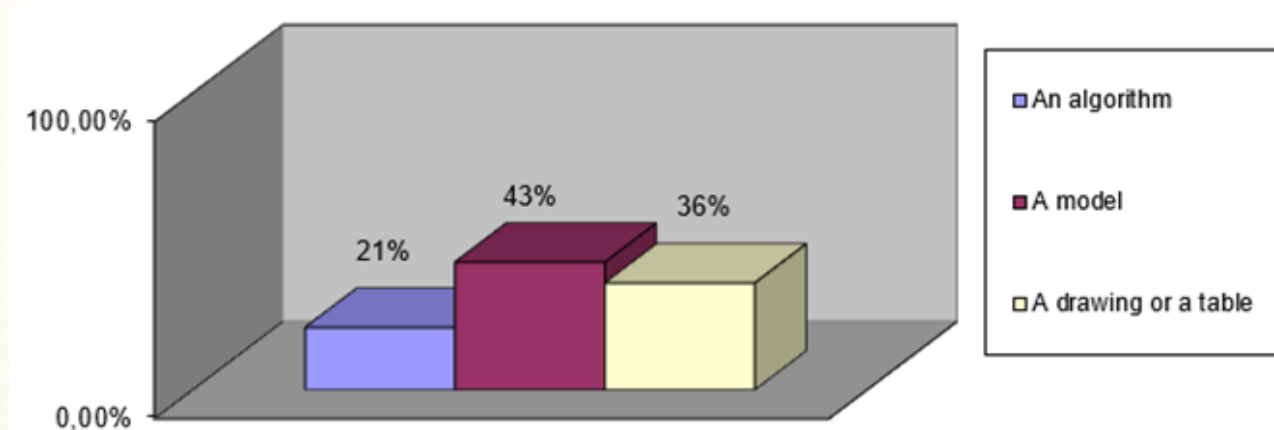


Figure 4 (a) Answers to the question “What form of visualization of grammar do you consider the most effective”

The locative case of nouns (singular)

Locative	Masculine gender	- согласный + E	Лондон + е – в Лондоне
		-й, -ь => E	Китай: Кита + е – в Китае
	Feminine gender	-а, -я => E	Москва: Москв + е – в Москве деревня: деревн + е – в деревне
		-ия => ИИ	Россия – в России

Figure 4 (b) An algorithm

Я купил этот журнал в магазине.

Exercise 1. Answer the questions in the affirmative.

Model: — Вы живёте в городе?
— Да, мы живём в городе.

1. Ваша семья живёт в деревне? 2. Вы учитесь в университете? 3. Ваша сестра учится в школе? 4. Сейчас студенты сидят в классе? 5. Они берут книги в библиотеке? 6. Мы покупаем книги в магазине? 7. Вы покупаете газеты в киоске?

Лампа стоит на столе.

Exercise 2. Answer the questions in the affirmative.

Model: — Книга лежит на столе?
— Да, книга лежит на столе.

Figure 4 (c) Example of a model [33, p. 57]

Мужской род		Женский род	Средний род	
				
Именительный падеж		Предложный падеж		
единственное число	единственное число	множественное число		
Это {	сто́л.	Кни́ги лежа́т на столЕ́,	на столА́Х.	-АХ
	стенА́.	Карти́ны вися́т на стенЕ́,	на стенА́Х.	
	окно́.	Цветы́ стоя́т на окнЕ́,	на о́кнаХ.	
	ла́герь.	Де́ти отды́хают в ла́гереЕ,	в лагерьА́Х.	-ЯХ
	музе́й.	Мы бы́лы в музеЕ́,	в музе́ях.	
	деревня́.	Крестья́не живу́т в дере́внеЕ,	в деревня́Х.	

Figure 4 (d) A drawing or a table [34, p. 42]

Phonetics and grammar are closely connected since “words interacting in speech with grammar and phonetics are the key elements of oral or written communication” [21, p. 89]. The acquisition of vocabulary is a long process. It is difficult for Angolans to remember the meaning of a lexeme if it has an unfamiliar plane of expression (a different graphic image or a different phonetic form). Our research has shown that the most effective way of acquiring Russian vocabulary is by using pictures, drawings, or photographs.

Angolan students find it particularly difficult to memorize words expressing abstract concepts. In this case, the teacher can use abstract nouns in specific contexts or specific situations and involve students in role-play or problem-solving activities. Unfortunately,

explaining the meaning of an abstract noun in Portuguese does not prove to be very effective, because Angolan students do not find it easy to establish connections between the meaning of the Russian lexeme and its equivalent in Portuguese, particularly when they try to acquire abstract notions out of class.

Another important factor is the frequency of a lexeme and the peculiarities of its use in speech. If students do not hear the word in everyday communication, they subconsciously refer the word to the passive vocabulary and do not consider it important to memorize it. Such an attitude to the composition of his/her Russian idiolect subsequently leads to problems, for example, with the acquisition of the terms which are necessary for communication in their chosen area of science. Angolan students find it difficult to remember the general academic and special professional terminology. Students explain it in the following way “people do not say it in the street” or “this is not interesting”. In order to teach academic vocabulary, the teacher needs to spend much more time motivating students to learn this type of words. The teacher’s toolbox includes role-play, ICT and ‘search-type’ assignments using the Internet resources.

According to S. Sheveleva, “to choose a style of pedagogical communication adequate to the national and cultural identity of students, i.e. to neutralize a cultural barrier, it is necessary to be aware and take into account the students’ national, cultural and educational traditions” [35, p. 116]. Students from Angola belong to the intuitive-sensual psychological type of learning a foreign language, which is characterized by a rapid mastery of a foreign language and, simultaneously, the ease of thinking in it.

Generally speaking, a foreign language is important for students as a means of communication. In this regard, students from Angola do not have problems communicating in Russian. They are happy to answer questions, make up dialogues and actively discuss issues, which concern them. Yet, Angolan students do not pay attention to grammar and syntax because “people understand what I mean even if I make mistakes”.

Our research shows that the quality of productive types of speech (speaking and writing) reflects such character traits and speech behaviour patterns of Angolans as emotionality and proneness to procrastination. Our observation shows that Angolan students like to speak rather than write because in oral communication they can, firstly, better express their feelings and emotions, and secondly, quickly convey the necessary information to the interlocutor, without hesitating about the choice of lexical or grammar means of expression. As for receptive types of speech (listening and reading), the biggest difficulty for Angolans is listening comprehension, especially if students are asked to listen to an audio recording. The survey results confirm our observation and conclusions (Fig. 5).

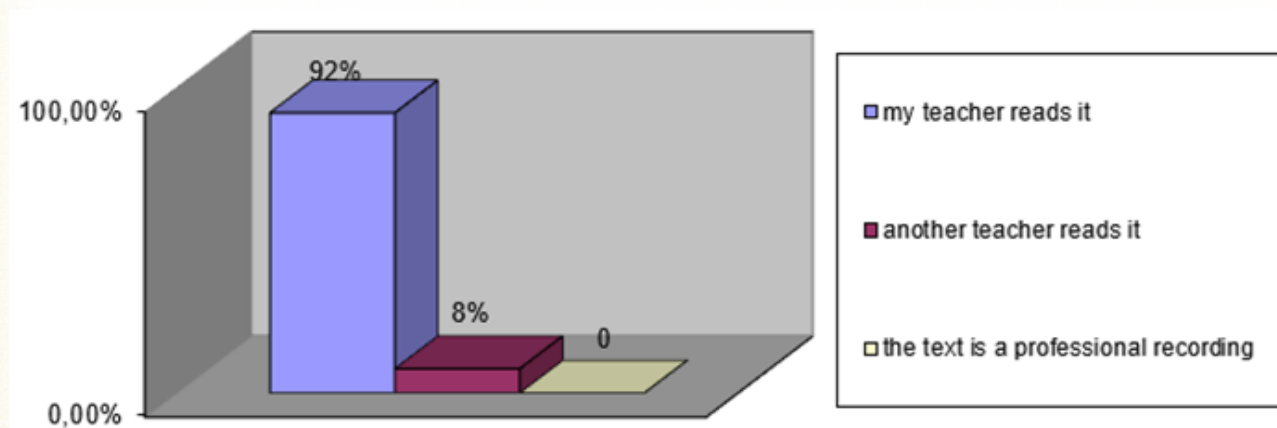


Figure 5 Answers to the question “When do you understand texts in Russian better?”

It is important to note that listening and reading are the most difficult types of speech for students from Angola. Text is an indispensable component of both. Angolan students find it arduous to perceive texts, which incorporate reasoning and argumentation. To work with texts of this type, the teacher should preferably use role-play, problem-based learning and draw the students' attention to the goals of the chosen type of learning activity. It is necessary to increase the students' motivation for working with this text type and demonstrate its connection with their future profession.

Our research proved the impact of national and cultural characteristics on mastering a foreign language. The Republic of Angola belongs to a group of countries having the collectivist type of culture, in which family, or belonging to a clan (or other social groups) is of particular importance. Another distinctive feature of the Angolan culture is its polyactivity, i.e. Angolans are very sociable, impatient and prefer dialogues to monologues. Consequently, they quickly lose interest in learning if they get bored. Angolan students prefer to talk at length about books they read, discuss topics directly related to their life, family and hobbies, write about themselves, listen to audio texts about human relations, everyday life, etc. (Fig. 6-9).

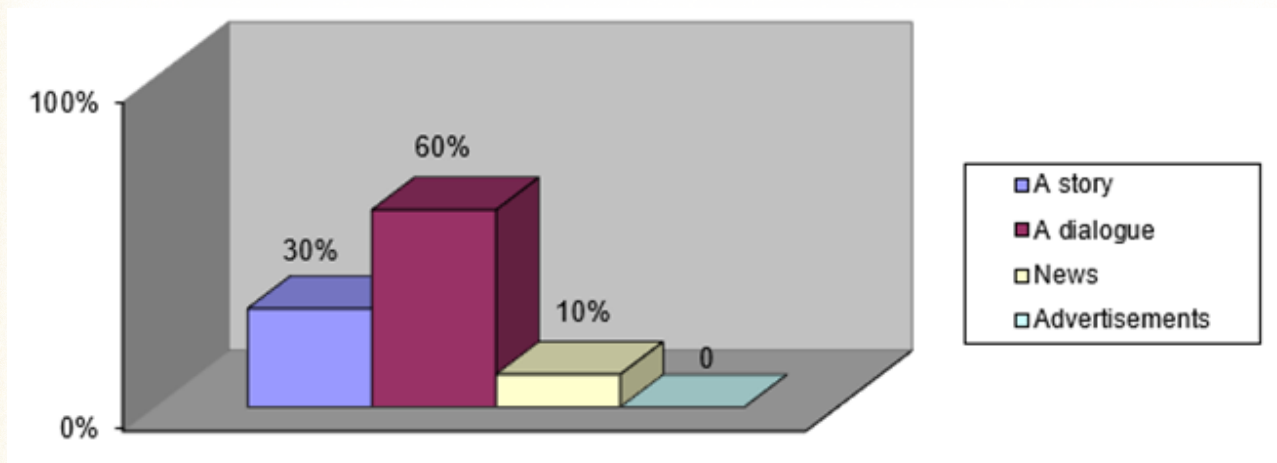


Figure 6 Answers to the question “What do you like to listen to in class?”

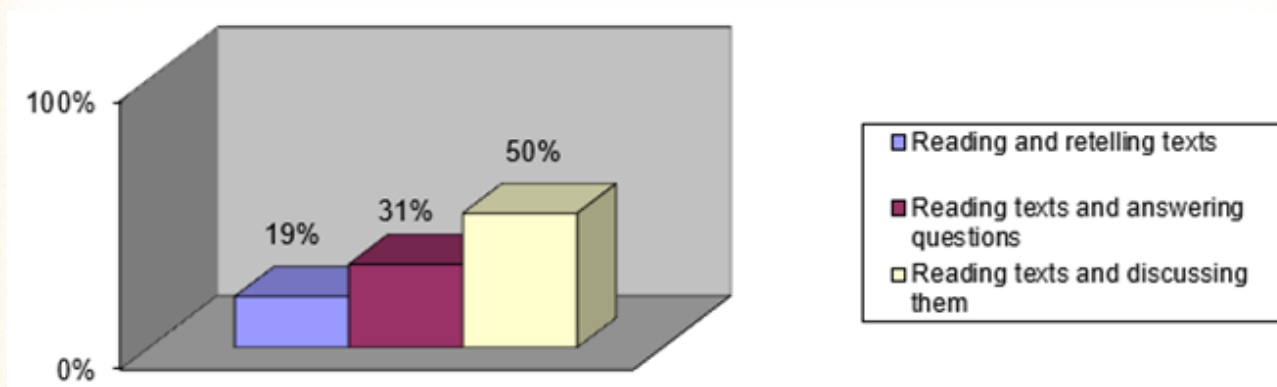


Figure 7 Answers to the question “What type of class activity do you prefer?”

Students from the Republic of Angola enjoy talking about their culture, compare life in their country with the life in the country of study and identify differences and similarities in the fields of their professional activity in Angola and Russia. Consequently, it is not surprising that regional geography plays an important role in teaching a foreign language since in the process of mastering the language students are “exposed to a new culture and get acquainted with its main elements: spiritual life, art, national traditions, politics, economy etc. [8, p. 49].

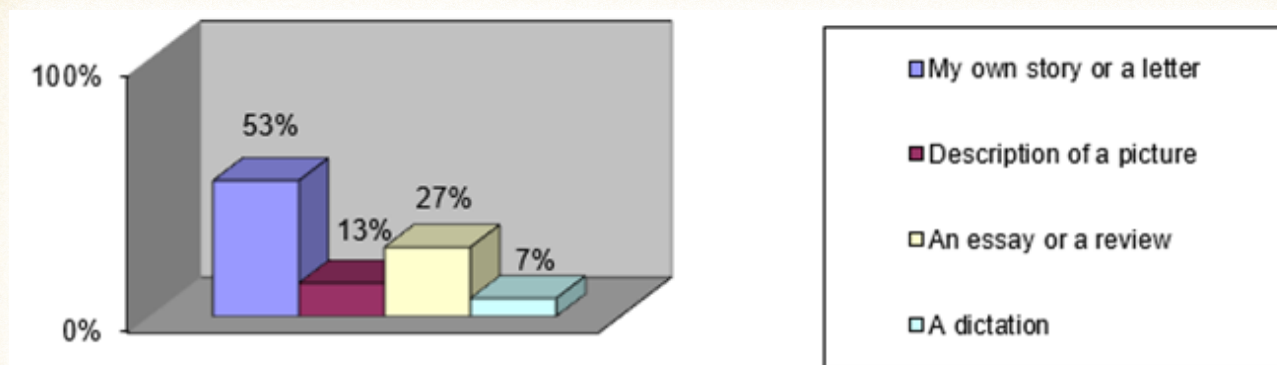


Figure 8 Responses to the question “What do you prefer to write in class?”

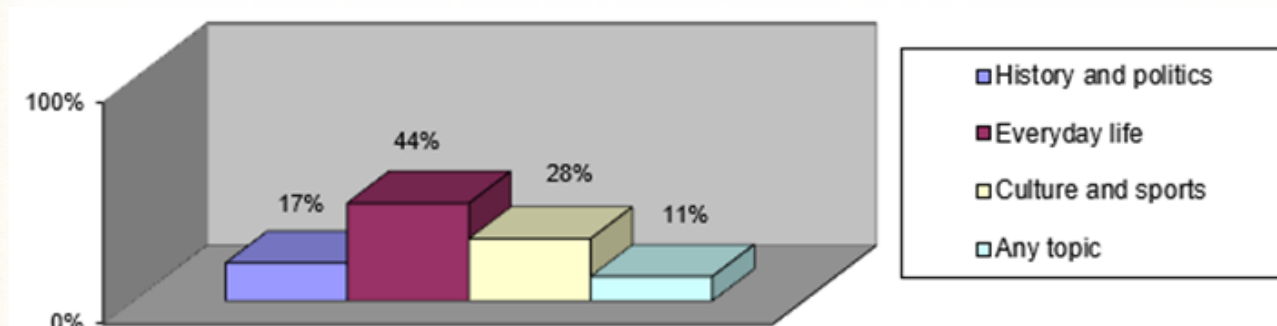


Figure 9 Answers to the question “What topic would you like to discuss in class?”

Undoubtedly, the lifestyle, climate, food habits, culture and traditions in Angola are very different from those of Russia, so the discussion of topics related to the national and cultural specifics, watching Russian films, listening to Russian music, ‘enacting’ stereotypical everyday situations, reading texts that contain both linguistic and cultural material help students understand the concept of ‘Russian soul’ in all its intricacy.

As our survey results show, the weather in Russia is not considered to be the most surprising factor for Angolan students. The complexity of the Russian language, culture and the way of life of young people seem to be more surprising for them. However, most of all, Angolan students are struck by the disrespect of the Russian people for the older generation, careerism and formalism (Fig. 10).

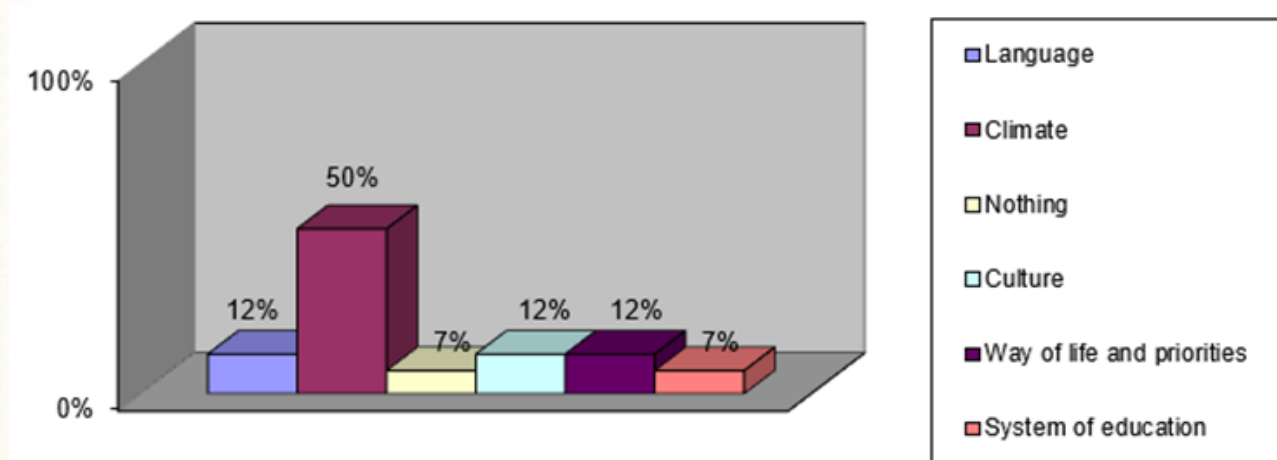


Figure 10 Answers to the question “What strikes you most in Russia?”

To facilitate a deeper understanding of Russia’s everyday life, the TRFL teacher should focus the students’ attention on the topics given above, selecting relevant

pieces of fiction or journalism, reference and teaching materials as well as audio and video recordings to facilitate a much better understanding of Russian culture and life in Russia in general. In addition, at the initial stage of training, the TRFL teacher should introduce texts related to the region or the country of the language the students study since this will increase the students' motivation and satisfy their communicative and cognitive needs.

Among other relevant facts revealed, we found out that the overall emotional background, the atmosphere in the classroom and outside it play an increasingly important role. If students feel they are listened to and cared for, they will learn the material much faster. The opposite is also true: if the atmosphere in the classroom is rather formal, Angolan students quickly begin to lose interest in learning. During TRFL classes, a productive dialogue with students from Angola can only be built provided they feel at ease in class as if they were in their own family. This is not accidental since according to our survey, almost all students miss their families (Fig. 11).

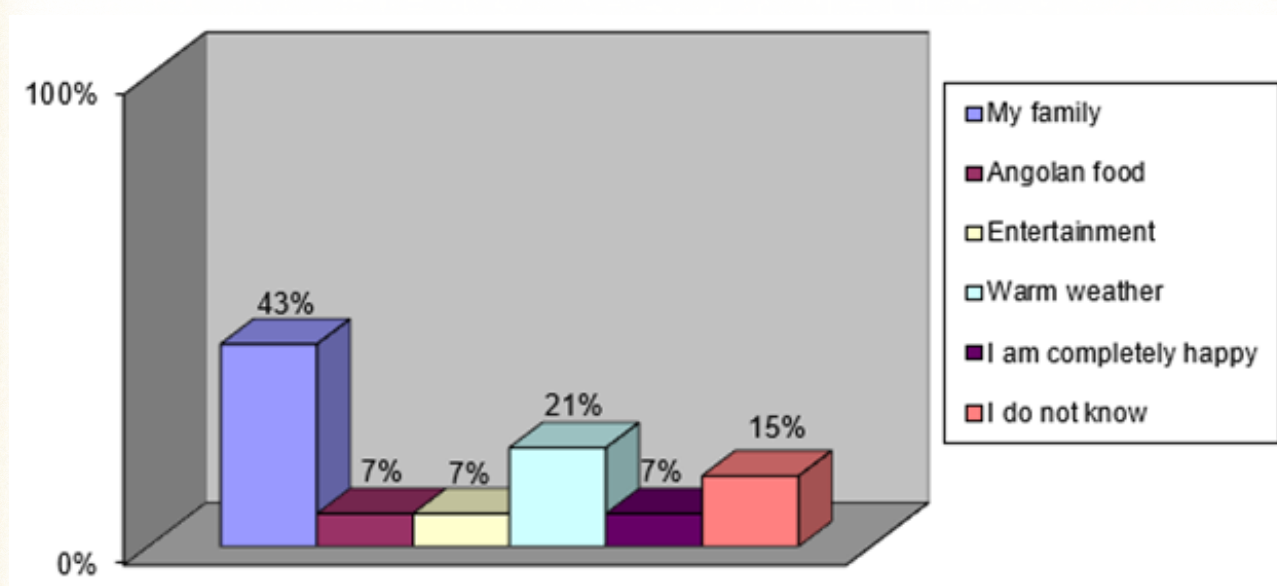


Figure 11 Answers to the question “What do you miss or lack in Russia?”

Our survey shows that Angolan students are satisfied with their life and study in Russia, as well as with the attitude of Russian people to them. They are less satisfied with the living conditions in the dormitory (only 69% of the respondents gave a positive assessment). In addition to living conditions, most students wrote about a lack of diversity in their life and boredom.

Another noteworthy fact is that the Angolans do not always treat Russian people well (only 69% of the respondents spoke positively about residents of the country of study). Angolan students noted laziness, cunning, detachment and emotional ‘coldness’ as the main factors leading to their “rejection of Russians” (Fig. 12).

When asked about similarities between Russians and Angolans, what they are and in what way Russians and Angolans differ from each other, the students found it difficult to answer these questions. They saw differences between Russians and Angolans in their character and behaviour (40% and 13%, respectively), and similarities are mainly related to lifestyle. Yet, some Angolans did not see any differences between them and Russians (Fig. 13).

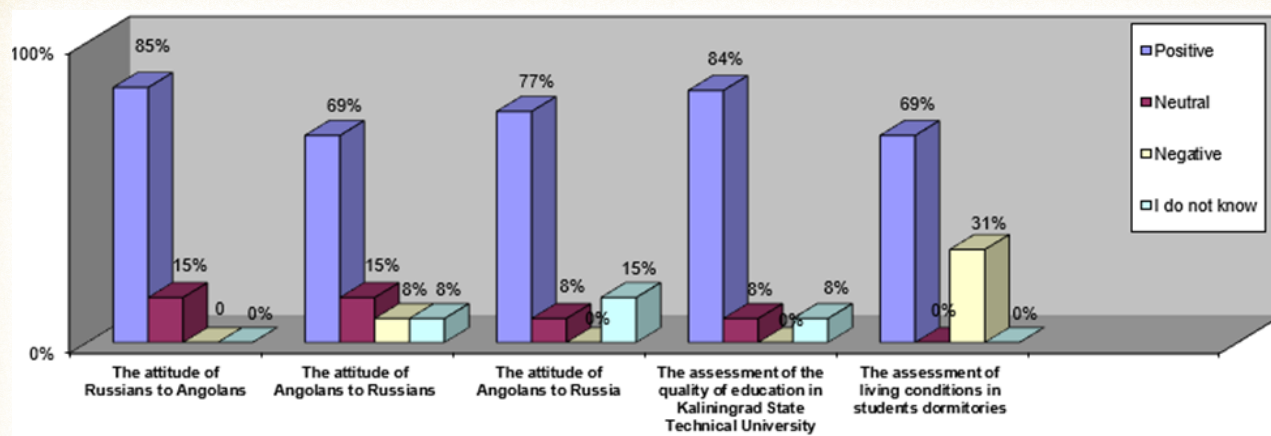


Figure 12 The attitude of Angolans to life and education in the Russian Federation

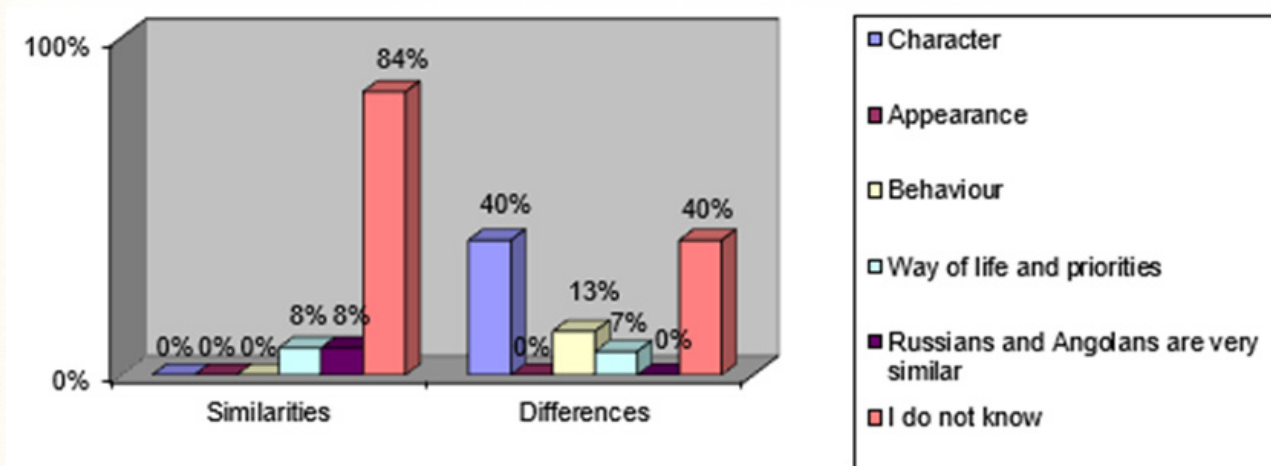


Figure 13 Similarities and differences between Russians and Angolans

Our research has shown that there is no interdependence between the level of the Russian language and the degree of adaptation of students from the Republic of Angola to life in Russia. Several respondents can speak Russian fluently, but still prefer to communicate with Russian speakers only when absolutely necessary. And vice versa, there are students who speak Russian poorly but are, nevertheless, proactive in communication, using gestures, facial expressions and occasional elements of an intermediary language (in most cases, English).

Individual psychological characteristics of students are important factors in determining their linguistic behaviour. This topic requires further research, possibly taking into account the data obtained in the study by W. Lowie, C. Isabelli-García etc. [36; 37].

Conclusion

Our study shows that difficulties experiences by students from the Republic of Angola are mainly related to language interference.

1. The choice of technologies and methods of teaching Angolan students depends on their personality type;

2. Visual presentation language material, cognitive-communicative strategies, role plays and a focus on quick progress and practical use of the acquired skills “Here and now” prove to be the most effective;

3. Taking into account the national and cultural peculiarities of students contributes to achieving learning objectives and outcomes. Selected teaching materials should include relevant linguistic material and contain a regional and geographic component;

4. The interdependence between the proficiency of the Russian language and the degree of social adaptation of Angolan students in Russia requires a more comprehensive analysis of a wide range of factors including psychological and extralinguistic ones. Our observation of the life of Angolan students in Russia and the analysis of the results of the survey show that the degree of their social adaptation to the Russian-speaking environment depends on the student's personality type. Another important factor that has to be taken into account is the knowledge of an intermediary language (in our case, English), and the ability of Russian speakers to communicate in it. Only on the basis of this comprehensive analysis, we can draw conclusions about the dependence of the level of social adaptation and integration of Angolan students and the degree of their knowledge of Russian.

Further research into the problem will focus on the study of all the above-mentioned factors and the emotional component - creating a comfortable atmosphere in class. Another interesting area of research is an attempt to build a model of teaching Russian to Angolan students (and, more broadly, students from Africa) in Russian universities.

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