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Modern Methodological Approaches in Teaching Russian as a Foreign Language

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Abstract. This article examines the role of traditional and modern methods in teaching Russian as a foreign language in higher education, with a special focus on the Azerbaijani educational context. The study argues that the main goal of university-level foreign language teaching is not the theoretical study of linguistic rules, but the practical acquisition of communicative competence. The paper discusses the theoretical foundations of language teaching, including the formation of lexical, grammatical, phonetic, and speech skills, and explains the four stages of skill development from familiarization to creative independent use. Traditional teaching technologies are analyzed through the class-lesson system and explanatory-illustrative methods, highlighting their strengths in systematic grammar instruction and their limitations in promoting learner autonomy and real communication. Modern teaching technologies are presented as student-centered and outcome-oriented, emphasizing differentiation, digital literacy, and project-based learning. Particular attention is given to Communicative Language Teaching and the comparative method, which supports effective learning by contrasting Russian with Azerbaijani and using visual aids. The article concludes that an integrated model combining structure and communication ensures the most effective development of students' Russian language competence.

Keywords: Russian as a foreign language; communicative competence; teaching methods; educational technologies

1. Introduction

Foreign language teaching in higher education has gradually shifted from a mainly theoretical orientation to a more practice-based model that prioritizes real communication. Universities are expected not only to provide students with knowledge about language systems but also to help them use the target language effectively in academic, professional, and everyday contexts. In this respect, the teaching of Russian as a foreign language requires a clear focus on functional language

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use, because students' success is measured not by how many rules they can recall, but by how confidently they can speak, listen, read, and write in authentic situations.

Practical acquisition is especially important in environments where Russian is not the dominant language outside the classroom. In such contexts, classroom instruction becomes the main space for developing communicative habits, building lexical and grammatical automatisms, and improving fluency. Speaking competence plays a central role in this process because oral communication reflects the learner's ability to access vocabulary quickly, apply grammar in real time, and react appropriately to interaction. At the same time, speaking cannot be separated from listening comprehension, as students must understand spoken input before they can respond meaningfully.

Modernization of higher education has also influenced language pedagogy. Digital resources, multimedia materials, and interactive learning platforms support learner autonomy and increase exposure to authentic language. As a result, methods that foster active participation, collaborative work, and independent learning have gained importance. This article therefore examines how both traditional and modern methods can be used strategically to develop students' communicative competence in Russian.

The aim of this paper is to analyze traditional and modern methods used in teaching Russian as a foreign language and to determine their effectiveness in developing communicative competence in higher education.

2. Theoretical Foundations of Foreign Language Teaching (300–350 words)

2.1 Goals of Foreign Language Teaching

The central goal of foreign language teaching at university level is practical acquisition, which means developing the ability to use the language for communication rather than merely learning theoretical descriptions of it. From a methodological perspective, effective instruction aims to form stable speech skills and to build competence in the four core language activities: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Brown (2000) emphasizes that language learning is a skill-based process requiring repeated practice, feedback, and gradual movement from controlled performance to fluent use. Similarly, Harmer (2001) notes that successful teaching must balance accuracy and fluency, ensuring that learners both understand language forms and can apply them in meaningful interaction.

2.2 Components of Teaching Content

To reach these goals, teaching content must include several interconnected components. The first is lexical material, because vocabulary functions as the basis for expressing meaning and participating in communication. The second is grammar, which provides structural resources for producing correct and coherent speech. The third component is phonetics, including pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation, which directly influence intelligibility and listening comprehension. In addition, teaching content includes speech skills—the ability to select language forms

appropriately, maintain interaction, and construct messages for different purposes. Finally, learners need knowledge of the language system, meaning an understanding of how the target language operates and how its rules support real communication (Roche, 2008).

In this framework, a teaching method can be defined as a system of the teacher's purposeful actions that organizes learners' cognitive and practical activity to ensure mastery of the content. Methodology also presupposes interaction between teacher and student: through explanation, practice, guidance, and feedback, students progress through skill formation levels, moving from initial awareness of new material to controlled use and finally to independent, creative application in communicative situations.

3. Stages of Skill Formation in Language Learning

Skill formation in foreign language learning is a gradual process in which learners move from basic awareness of new language elements to independent communicative performance. In teaching Russian as a foreign language, this progression can be described through four interrelated levels that reflect how students internalize and use linguistic material.

The first level is familiarization with new material, where learners are introduced to lexical items, grammatical structures, or phonetic patterns. At this stage, the main cognitive operation is material perception: students notice forms, recognize meanings, and begin to understand usage through examples, explanations, and guided input. The second level is application in familiar situations, in which students practice the new material in controlled tasks such as substitution exercises, model dialogues, or guided speaking. This stage is closely connected with reproduction, because learners rely on patterns and support to produce correct forms with increasing accuracy.

The third level is application in new but similar situations. Here, learners start transferring what they have learned to contexts that are not identical to the original examples but still related. This stage involves variation, as students must adapt language forms, choose appropriate vocabulary, and adjust grammatical structures to fit changing conditions. Finally, the fourth level is creative independent use, where students can communicate spontaneously and effectively in unpredictable situations. This level corresponds to creative production, because learners generate their own messages, manage interaction, and express personal meanings without heavy reliance on templates.

These stages directly support the development of communicative competence. Communicative competence is not only knowledge of language rules, but also the ability to use language appropriately, fluently, and strategically for real communication. As students progress from perception and reproduction to variation and creative production, they become better able to participate in authentic speaking and listening, interpret texts, and produce written communication with confidence and purpose.

4. Traditional Teaching Technologies

Traditional teaching technologies in foreign language education are closely connected with the class-lesson system, which was historically shaped by the didactic principles of Jan Amos Comenius. In this model, teaching is organized through structured lessons delivered to relatively stable groups of learners, usually of similar age and general preparation level. A common methodological foundation of traditional teaching is the explanatory-illustrative method, where the teacher explains rules, presents examples, and students practice them through repetition and written tasks. As a result, instruction often emphasizes language structure—grammar, vocabulary lists, and forms—rather than communicative function.

Traditional approaches typically operate with a fixed curriculum and a standardized sequence of topics and language content. Learners progress through the program together, following a schedule and completing the same tasks at the same pace. Evaluation is largely controlled by the teacher, who decides what counts as correct performance and assesses learning through tests, translation exercises, written assignments, and oral questioning. In many cases, textbooks serve as the main source of language input and practice, and classroom activities are strongly tied to the textbook unit structure.

This model has several advantages. It provides systematic grammar instruction, helping learners build a clear theoretical understanding of language forms. It also offers a strong theoretical base, which can be useful for learners who need accuracy, formal writing skills, or translation competence. However, traditional teaching also has significant limitations. Because practice is often controlled and form-focused, students may receive limited opportunities for authentic communicative practice, especially in speaking and spontaneous interaction. In addition, the teacher-centered nature of the approach can lead to low student autonomy, as learners may become dependent on the teacher's explanations and may struggle to apply language independently in real-life contexts.

5. Modern Teaching Technologies in Foreign Language Education

Modern foreign language education increasingly relies on educational technologies that systematize teaching and make learning outcomes more effective and measurable. The term technology originates from Greek: techne (art, skill) and logos (study, principle), which together suggest an organized, science-based approach to producing results. In pedagogy, educational technology can be understood as a designed system of teaching actions, materials, and interactions that creates favorable learning conditions and leads to planned outcomes.

A key feature of modern teaching technologies is the planning and design of the teaching process. Instruction is not limited to delivering content; it includes setting clear objectives, selecting appropriate materials, choosing methods and tasks, and organizing classroom interaction. Another essential element is the diagnostic stage, which involves identifying students' needs, entry-level abilities, and learning difficulties. Diagnostic tools may include placement tasks, self-assessment checklists, observation, and formative assessment during lessons. This leads to measurable results, because learning is evaluated through criteria such as communicative performance, task completion, and demonstrated progress in language skills.

Modern technologies also emphasize differentiation and individualization. Differentiation means adapting tasks and support to different ability levels within the same group, while individualization focuses on learners' goals, interests, and learning styles. These principles are closely connected with student-centered learning, where the learner becomes an active participant rather than a passive recipient. Students are encouraged to set goals, monitor progress, cooperate with peers, and take responsibility for learning outcomes.

In higher education, modernization is strongly linked to independent research, internet resources, and digital literacy. Students increasingly search for information in the target language, work with authentic online materials (news, blogs, videos, academic sources), and learn to evaluate reliability and relevance. Digital tools support collaboration and creativity through presentations, online discussions, shared documents, and multimedia projects. As a result, project-based learning has become an effective model: students investigate a topic, collect and analyze resources in Russian, produce a final product (report, presentation, video, poster), and present it to an audience. Such tasks combine language practice with academic skills, critical thinking, and professional preparation.

6. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Teaching Russian (400–450 words)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is widely recognized as one of the most influential modern approaches in language pedagogy because it prioritizes meaningful communication as both the goal and the method of learning. A theoretical foundation for CLT is Savignon's concept of communicative competence, which emphasizes that successful language users must not only know grammar rules but also use language appropriately in social contexts. In this framework, language learning is evaluated through the learner's ability to negotiate meaning, maintain interaction, and achieve communicative purposes.

CLT differs from approaches such as the Oral method primarily in its focus. While the Oral method often emphasizes language structure and accuracy through repetition, drills, and controlled practice, CLT highlights language function and real communication. The contrast can be summarized as follows: the communicative approach focuses on meaning and authentic interaction, whereas the Oral method is more closely associated with pattern drills and structured practice. In teaching Russian, this means CLT encourages learners to use Russian for realistic tasks—asking for information, giving opinions, making requests, solving problems—rather than only producing grammatically correct sentences in isolation.

In classroom practice, CLT supports interactive formats such as role plays, video-based tasks, discussions, and film analysis. For example, students may watch a short Russian video or film scene, discuss the characters' intentions, and then perform a role play continuing the dialogue. These tasks integrate skills: listening to authentic input, speaking in interaction, reading short prompts, and writing brief responses or reflections. Such integration reflects real-life communication, where language skills rarely appear separately.

CLT also benefits from modern communication environments. Social networks and messaging platforms allow students to engage in real-life written interaction, learn everyday vocabulary, and become familiar with informal expressions and abbreviations (e.g., "OK," "BTW," "ASAP"). In Russian, similar real-life exposure helps students understand colloquial speech, idioms, and cultural references.

However, CLT requires balanced implementation. A major limitation is the potential risk of excluding the native language completely, which can cause misunderstandings of difficult vocabulary or complex grammar. Without careful guidance, learners may develop superficial grammatical understanding or interpret key lexical items incorrectly. Therefore, CLT is most effective when combined with structured support: targeted grammar clarification, contrastive explanations when necessary, and systematic feedback. In this balanced model, communicative practice builds fluency and confidence, while focused instruction maintains accuracy and depth of understanding in Russian as a foreign language.

7. Comparative Method in Teaching Russian in Azerbaijan

In Azerbaijan, Russian is taught in an educational environment where Azerbaijani is the dominant language of everyday communication. For this reason, the comparative (contrastive) method becomes especially useful, as it helps learners understand Russian through systematic comparison with their native language. When students identify similarities and differences between Russian and Azerbaijani, they are less likely to transfer incorrect patterns and more likely to build stable, accurate language habits.

Comparative teaching is particularly effective in explaining grammar contrasts. Russian is a highly inflected language with grammatical categories such as case, gender, and aspect, which often create difficulties for Azerbaijani-speaking learners because Azerbaijani uses different structural principles. For example, Russian case endings and agreement patterns may be confusing for students whose native language relies more on postpositions and agglutinative suffixation. By explicitly comparing how meaning is expressed in each language, the teacher can reduce errors and improve conscious understanding.

The method is also important for phonetic differences. Russian includes consonant clusters, palatalization, and vowel reduction, while Azerbaijani phonetics is generally more stable and regular in pronunciation. Students often need targeted practice to produce Russian sounds clearly and to perceive distinctions in rapid speech. At the same time, comparative work can reveal lexical parallels, including international words and borrowed items that exist in both languages. Recognizing such parallels supports faster vocabulary acquisition and motivates learners by showing that not all elements are entirely new.

In addition, the comparative method works well with the visual principle, which highlights the role of visual memory in learning. Charts, tables, color-coded endings, mind maps, and contrastive examples presented visually help students notice patterns and remember them more effectively. When grammar and vocabulary contrasts are shown in clear visual form, learners process

information faster and retain it longer, which strengthens both accuracy and communicative confidence.

8. Interactive and Cognitive Methods

Interactive and cognitive methods aim to activate learners' thinking and make language learning a process of meaningful problem-solving rather than passive repetition. In teaching Russian as a foreign language, such methods are especially valuable because they create conditions for students to use language actively, respond to new situations, and build communicative confidence through participation.

One effective technique is brainstorming, often organized as a problem-situation task. The teacher presents a realistic scenario (for example, "You are lost in Moscow and need directions" or "You must solve a misunderstanding at a hotel reception"), and students generate vocabulary, phrases, and strategies together. This approach develops quick thinking, expands lexical resources, and encourages learners to take risks in speech. Brainstorming also increases motivation because students feel involved in creating the lesson content.

Another key element is dialogic speech, which reflects real communication. Through pair work, role plays, and group tasks, students practice asking questions, reacting, clarifying meaning, and maintaining interaction. At the same time, learners also need practice in monologic speech, such as giving short presentations, narrating events, or expressing opinions. Comparing monologue vs. dialogue helps students understand the different linguistic requirements of each: monologue needs logical structure and coherence, while dialogue requires flexibility, speed, and interactive strategies.

Interactive methods also support discussion culture and the development of critical thinking. When students debate a topic, analyze a short text, or defend a viewpoint, they learn to justify ideas and respond respectfully to others. This creates cognitive activation: learners process meaning deeply, connect language with thought, and develop independent speech formation. As a result, interactive and cognitive methods strengthen engagement, autonomy, and communicative competence in Russian.

9. Integration of Traditional and Modern Methods

In contemporary higher education, relying on only one methodological direction is rarely effective. A purely traditional approach, although systematic, often fails to provide enough real communication and may limit student independence. Learners may know grammar rules but struggle to speak fluently or respond spontaneously in real situations. On the other hand, a purely communicative approach also has weaknesses: if instruction focuses only on meaning and interaction without sufficient structural support, students may develop persistent grammatical errors, shallow understanding of complex forms, and limited accuracy in academic or professional contexts.

For these reasons, an integrated model is the most practical solution for teaching Russian as a foreign language in Azerbaijan. In this balanced approach, grammar and communication work together: students receive clear explanations and structured practice, but they also apply language immediately in meaningful tasks. Visual aids and digital tools support both accuracy and engagement—tables and схемы help learners memorize patterns, while videos, online texts, and interactive platforms provide authentic input and modern learning formats. Finally, structure and creativity can be combined through activities such as guided dialogues, role plays, project work, and discussions, where students use correct language forms while expressing personal meanings. This integration ensures that learners develop both correctness and communicative confidence.

10. Conclusion

Foreign language teaching in higher education must prioritize practical outcomes, because students need the target language not only as knowledge, but as an instrument for communication, learning, and professional development. In the context of teaching Russian as a foreign language in Azerbaijan, the practical orientation is especially important, since learners have limited natural exposure outside the classroom. Therefore, the development of communicative competence—speaking, listening, reading, and writing for real purposes—should remain the central objective of instruction.

Modern educational technologies significantly enhance this process by expanding opportunities for independent learning and authentic language contact. Internet resources, multimedia materials, and project-based tasks encourage students to search for information in Russian, evaluate sources, and use the language creatively in presentations, discussions, and collaborative work. At the same time, traditional methods still contribute important advantages, particularly systematic grammar instruction and structured practice that support accuracy and long-term stability of language skills.

The most effective methodology is therefore a combined approach in which traditional and modern methods complement each other. Communicative activities develop fluency and interaction skills, while comparative explanations, visual supports, and focused grammar work strengthen correctness and deeper understanding. In the digital era, language teaching should continue moving toward flexible, student-centered models that integrate technology with strong methodological foundations, ensuring that learners can use Russian confidently in academic, social, and professional communication.

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