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Russian For Professional Purposes Russ 399R Academic Internship

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Introduction

“Russian for Professional Purposes” was a project to design a curriculum that would teach students a way to independently specialize their Russian. The course directed students to choose a professional field and then do activities. Activities built vocabulary and confidence in communicating about and for the profession. During the span of the ORCA project, we developed the new curriculum, piloted it, and implemented it as the BYU course Russian 399R Academic Internship. The course developed helped me personally, as I piloted it, develop skills and talents in life long language learning and implementation.

Methodology

The methodology behind “Russian for Professional Purposes” included guiding students through a curriculum of self-motivated activities that replicated activities that can be done beyond graduation. The main language activity was creating vocabulary lists. Students composed lists of 30 words found from field-related materials. Since I am studying international relations, I found Russian political documents. These documents included news articles from the prominent Russian news network The Russian Times as well as transcripts of speeches by Russian President Vladimir Putin to the Russian congressional body, the Duma. Students from different academic backgrounds found articles about their specific field.

“Russian for Professional Purposes” focuses on more than just language development, but also emphasis personal development by language means. The course also focuses heavily on personal development and professional success in the internship the student participates in. Many of the assignments provide advice such as setting expectations with the internship supervisor, and other reflection assignments to assess the students work in the internship. Students are required to upload videos in which they talk about their reflection in Russian.

Results

As someone who piloted the course, I found it effective in several ways. The course allowed me time to find sources that I otherwise would not have found. I now have a far larger database of international relations related material in Russian. I do not believe that such a large collection and understanding would have come simply through curiosity. With the little nudge of having a grade attached to the task, students, like myself, have and will continue to find Russian materials that lead to lifelong learning of professional level vocabulary. When piloting the program, I knew that this would probably be an outcome. I did not, however, expect the large increase in Russian materials that I now listen to and read for pleasure. I finished the course two months ago and I still listen to and read Russian materials I found during my search. I listen to podcasts about personal finance and entrepreneurial endeavors in my free time as well as read the news in Russian every day. Creating an interest in Russian media that makes studying enjoyable is a great unexpected byproduct of the course.

While the results of the course demonstrate its effectiveness, there are still places of necessary improvement. The course does focus extensively on vocab acquisition, requiring four vocab lists of thirty

words each, but it thus far still lacks the necessary implementation of words so that they integrate into usable vocab. As we move to the future with the course it will be necessary to find ways for students to implement the vocab. Ways that we have discussed possibly doing this is through essays that summarize the sources and include the vocab words the student found during his or her search. The course “Russian for Professional Purposes” is an effective way to transition students to independently learning, and we will continue to fine tune it to make it even more effective.

Discussion

The beauty in the course that we developed is the simplicity of it. The course guides students, instead of instructs students. Thus, it does take effort from the student to find the materials, but this teaches them about where such materials are. We discussed possibly gathering the materials from each professional field so that everything can be found at one location; however, upon graduation the student would not have gained the ability to find useful sources. This course helps them gain this skill.

Conclusion

“Russian for Professional Purposes” will help students for years to come. It is currently a course for BYU, and we will continue to fine tune it until it benefits students to the highest degree. As someone who took the course, I am grateful for the skills that I have developed. It helps students learn how to independently learn the language. It is far from perfect in implementation, but it will get better and better as more take the course and as we gather more feedback.

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