

CHALLENGES IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES TO YOUNG ADULT BEGINNERS: RUSSIAN LANGUAGE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

© Ildiko CSAJBOK-TWEREFU
(University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana)

twerefou@yahoo.co.uk

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In this era of globalization where many adults and children learn foreign languages, teaching and learning strategies differs according to the age, motivation, goals and experience of the learner in previous foreign language learning, among others. Students who are already acquainted with a foreign language, should learn a new foreign language easier, than those who are not. University students in many countries and in Ghana to be specific, learn a new foreign language not as a second (L2), but as a third (L3) or fourth (L4) language. However, in several cases, language instructors meet students who really struggle with the learning of the new foreign language. In this article we examine challenges language instructors may meet in young adult beginner's classes in the teaching of foreign languages based on our experience in teaching Russian language courses such as Beginning Russian, Pronunciation and Basic Reading Skills and Introduction to Russian Studies in the University of Ghana for the past decade. Special attention is paid to the psychological peculiarities of students and instructors, the social background of the students, their attitude toward languages, the relationship between the number of students in class and productivity, etc. The paper also provides good ways of taking students through the first lessons and how to help them to appreciate the language and culture of the people whose language is learnt.

Keywords: Russian language, language teaching/learning, attitude toward languages, appreciation of a new foreign language and culture

Ghana is a country in West Africa, on the bank of the Atlantic Ocean and gained independence from the British Empire in 1957. There are many different ethnic groups in the country and consequently many different languages. To avoid ethnic and other conflicts, English is the official language of the country (Ofori Quaah, 2009) but most people speak at least one local language. Children attend primary school at the age of six; however they attend pre-school, before they are six years old, especially in the cities. In such a case, children are admitted into primary one with basic writing, reading and counting skills that were acquired at the pre-school level. In the Ghanaian basic educational system, there are public and private

schools. The primary school is six years; it is followed by Junior High School which is three years and Senior High School which was three years but changed to four years in 2008. (The duration of Senior High School education was again revised to a three year programme in 2009.) Children can learn professions in vocational schools or join the labour market after completing their basic education in primary and junior high schools. At the tertiary level there are also public and private institutions: universities, polytechnics, institutes and colleges. Subsidized school fees are paid at all levels of education; however there are significant differences between public and private schools. Another difference that can be seen between the public and private schools is the number of pupils/students in a class. The public educational institutions are characterized by large class sizes at all levels of education compared to private educational institutions. In public basic schools, there can be about sixty children with one qualified teacher and two school attendants to provide support. In public tertiary institutions, the situation is the same. For example in the 2003/2004 academic year in the University of Ghana, Department of Economics, for the course *Introduction to Economics I*, one could count seven hundred and ninety two registered students. This course was handled by only three Lecturers with three Teaching Assistants. In the 2008/2009 academic year, for the course *Applied Mathematics for Economists* one could count about three hundred and sixty two students for a Lecturer and a Teaching Assistant. However, the large class sizes have been slightly reduced since the 2010/11 academic year.

The Department of Modern Languages, where currently six foreign languages are taught, is also characterized by large class sizes. Table 1 illustrates the number of registered students in the past 11 years.

From Table 1 it can be observed that there are some inconsistencies in the figures. First, in some cases there is no clear indication on students who should rewrite a paper because in the class-lists the regular and “re-sitting” students are listed together. For example, in the French Section in the 2006/2007 academic year there were 289 registered first year students but in the following year the number of registered second year students in French was 321, i.e. 32 more than they were in the first year. These 32 students may be students who failed their examinations at level 200 the previous years and are supposed to re-write the examinations. Another problem is the weaknesses in the registration procedure. It seems that it does not matter if the process is done manually or online. At the end of each semester there are quite a number of students who believe that they have registered properly online but their names are not included in the register.

There is also a new problem that challenges students. A few years back students could combine courses from many different Departments. Unfortunately, that situation has changed due to the large students’ population and clashes in the timetables. Currently, students study only three main subjects and general subjects such as *Academic Writing*, *Numeracy Skills* etc. at the first year. In the second year, students study two subjects and the general ones. In the third year, students continue with the two main courses but should decide if they will major, combine or minor in those subjects. In the fourth year, those who major/minor in the subjects will graduate with one subject while those who combined will graduate with the two subjects which they carried from the second year.

Table 1. *Number of Registered Students in the Department of Modern Languages (2000/2001-2011/2012 Academic Year)*

Language /Year	Arabic		Chinese ¹		French ²		Russian		Spanish		Swahili	
	10	20	10	20	10	200	10	20	10	20	10	20
2000/01 ³	67	20			14	95	63	25	12	10	11	56
2001/02	10	20			21	114	81	20	18	92	18	53
2002/03 ⁴	19	34			20	176	21	33	26	12	28	56
2003/04	12	22			29	152	17	34	20	15	27	97
2004/05	20	35			34	278	22	33	19	15	27	92
2005/06 ⁵	18	80			28	332	20	11	19	16	24	15
2006/07	12	71			29	283	12	81	23	18	16	11
2007/08	10	93			25	321 ⁶	80	73	18	24	17	13
2008/09 ⁷	71	72			24	267	55	58	13	22	92	14
2009/10	73	77	19		18	261	24	52	10	17	74	92
2010/11 ⁸	11	81	12	17	28	231	13	23	15	12	18	88
2011/12	79	18	10	47	22	206	89	29	13	60	15	17

(Source: <http://pmis-4.ug.edu.gh/classlists/index.php?q=vk8pr586k98gn7ng3jctsn39t0>)

¹ The Chinese language was introduced in the 2009/10 academic year.

² The French Section became a Department in the 2001/12 academic year.

³ In 2000/2001 and 2001/2002 academic years students were admitted into the first or second year of the University depending on the applicant's educational background. In the first year, only students in the French Section do study any language course. Students were introduced to the history of the language or the civilization of the country of the studied language (*Introduction to Russian Civilization and Culture, Introduction to Spanish History* etc.). Students started the language itself only in the second year (*Introduction to Russian Language and Literature, Introduction to Kiswahili* etc.). As a result of this system some students studied for four years, while others studied for three years. If a language student got a scholarship for the "year abroad" programme, then the student while outside Ghana had to defer the UG courses for one year.

⁴ From 2002/03 academic year, students were admitted only to the first year and the structure of the courses has been changed. Students started the language in the first year (*Elementary Arabic, Beginning Russian, Introduction to Spanish Language, Introduction to Swahili Language Structure* etc.).

⁵ In 2005/06 academic year, courses in the Department were revised.

⁶ Due to lack of proper registration a number of students are not included in the class-lists.

⁷ In 2008/09 academic year, the number of admitted students was reduced due to a new admission policy.

⁸ In 2010/11 academic year a new Bachelor of Arts program was introduced.

Objectives of the study

All over the World, there are courses which are trendy and others that are not. The situation is the same in the University of Ghana. Many students want to undertake courses in business, economics, etc. compared to courses in foreign languages. In the Department of Modern Languages there are many students, who did not want to learn the foreign language offered to them. The problem is that the University offers these languages to students in situation where their preferred course is fully subscribed. As a result, many students find themselves in a situation where they are admitted in the university but to study a course that they may have less interest. Such students usually decide to register and start the course with the intention of dropping it later. (However, as evidenced from Table 1 there are students who do not change their decision but stay in the language course.)

The objective of this study is to examine the factors which affect the productivity of learners, such as the psychological peculiarities of students and instructors, the social background of the students, their attitude toward languages, etc. so that language teachers may apply different methodology in the teaching process.

In order to examine these factors we undertook unstructured interviews with students who have dropped Russian language and those who continued to pursue the course. We also had in class and after class group discussions to confirm some of the results obtained from the unstructured interviews. Further, we had an extensive literature review to ascertain if our findings are in tandem with the literature.

Psychology in the language classes

In the Department of Modern Languages, University of Ghana, most of the students have two feelings: they are happy, because they are in Legon (the University of Ghana is located in the capital of Ghana, Accra. The campus lies in the part of the city, called Legon. Many people in Ghana refer to the University of Ghana as „Legon”); but at the same time they do not know what to do with the “given” subject. Lecturers therefore in the language courses often meet students in the classrooms who are not ready to take a new language.

To assess the attitude of students towards the study of Russian language in the University of Ghana, we conducted a survey in the 2010/2011 academic year. As seen in Table 2 majority of the students did not want to study this language.

Table 2. *Did you Choose Russian Language?*

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	12	9.6
No	113	90.4
Total	125	100

(Source: Authors' Survey, 2011)

Probably we would have received analogous responses if we had posed the same question to students studying other languages. There are different reasons why students chose to study a specific language. Some students want to study French because they did it in basic or secondary schools and they were successful. Some will want to study Spanish because they have done French before. Some may want to study Arabic, because they are Muslims or

they have heard about the beautiful and interesting culture of the Arabs. In recent years China's growing economy and the partnership between Ghana and China is motivating some students to study Chinese; Swahili is the most common native African language in Black Africa and the only used African language in the African Union (Péli, 2009). With regards to Russian language, there are people with high reputation in Ghana who studied in the former Soviet Union and therefore encourage their children, nephews or nieces to study Russian; but frankly, many students are not motivated to study the language.

There are many articles about motivation in language learning. If one types "motivation in language learning" in Google, the system will give more than ten million findings. However, in different cases different motivation can be seen. In the University of Ghana the first lectures should start with orientation. According to the students when they are admitted to language courses most of them do not know anything about the opportunities one may have with a good language background on the job market.

Apart from this, students classify the courses as "reading courses" (in students' jargon on campus, a course is said to be a "reading course" when by just reading the teaching materials one can get a good grade. For such courses there is no need to do a lot of calculations or practical classes which many students are not comfortable with), "A courses" (a course is said to be an 'A course' if at the end of the semester a student can obtain an "A" grade with little effort) and prestigious or non-prestigious. Unfortunately, a language course is mostly non-prestigious but definitely is not a "reading course". As language instructors know, the best way to acquire a foreign language is to practise it daily. But how can a student practise a language, which is not prestigious at all. Students tell stories of how others laugh at them when they tell them about the language they are studying. One can therefore conclude that many language students feel ashamed to open their books, make their assignment in the presence of their friends or to do pronunciation practice in the hostel.

Other frustrations come from the families. To understand the situation it is important to know the Ghanaian (extended) family system (see mongabay.com). In a number of cases when the parents are not able to finance the children's education uncles, aunties or other relatives may offer support. These relatives usually want the students to obtain a "marketable" degree. However, in many cases Degrees in foreign languages do not seem to be "marketable", although in the public sector there are some places where an applicant with a foreign language stands a high chance of being employed compared with an applicant without a foreign language. Also, in the private sector some companies do business with foreigners who need translators though such opportunities are limited.

Differences between the student's life at the senior secondary school and the university also influence the psychology of first year students. In Ghana, the basic and secondary schools use the term-system (three terms in an academic year – three months in school and one month of vacation), while in the universities the semester-system is used – thirteen weeks for studies one week for revision, four weeks for examinations followed by five weeks of mid semesters' break or ten weeks during the long vacation. In the basic and secondary schools, pupils' attitude and activities both academic and non-academic are often controlled; continuous feedback is provided to the students and their parents. In the universities however, there are no frequent class tests, class exercises, quizzes and other forms of controls apart from the interim assessments and the end of semester examinations. Lecturers demand for continuous assessment just in few cases due to the large class

sizes. Therefore in some cases university students do not receive enough stimuli from the Lecturer that enables them to know their continuous performance.

The freedom that students obtain from staying in hostels in the university compared to dormitories at the high school causes a real challenge. Specifically, many students in senior high schools travel far from their home to study in these schools and usually live in dormitories, where there are strict policies and students' life is coordinated and controlled throughout the day. At the university, students live in hostels, far from their parents and have the freedom to live completely different lifestyles. Some of them may cope with the new "freedom" while others need time to learn how to do things on their own: when to wake up or go to bed, when to attend church service, when to do an assignment, when and where to eat, etc. The change in environment together with the new found "freedoms" creates a huge learning gap for students; in such a situation, students may need help and mentorship. These resources are available, but unfortunately not well implemented due to large class sizes and the huge gap that exists between students and lecturers.

All these issues influence the psychology of students and therefore their performance, especially in the learning of a foreign language at lower levels.

On the other hand it is important to note that, there is no higher education without educators. Therefore it is imperative to talk about the psychology of the educators, i.e. the lecturers as well. Students need fresh, kind, erudite lecturers. Modern philosophy of the methodology of teaching says that one should not only teach knowledge but should demonstrate how to use it and how to think with it. Moreover, it is good to have discussions and feedbacks from students during lectures. To satisfying this methodology completely is very difficult in this environment, where teaching conditions could be better and where class sizes are so large.

Social backgrounds of students and language learning

As pertains in other universities, students' social backgrounds are quite diverse and to some extent influence their learning. For example, some students may come from poor homes. For such students, it may be difficult to pay school fees and therefore may register late. These students may attend lectures and tutorials only in a few weeks after the semester has begun (lthough in some cases students may do registration without the full payment of the tuition fee). In the teaching and learning of a new foreign language for example, the performance of the students will be affected because the first lessons are very important as our experience over the past decade suggests. In general, many first year students need frequent encouragement and advice from lecturers. However, in many cases both students and lecturers may not see the importance of proper communication between them.

The social background of the students also plays a significant role in establishing appropriate communication between lecturers and students. Students who come from families where it was normal to seek advice from others may ask for it from the lecturer. However, in the Ghanaian society, children are not taught to ask questions. Rather, they are told what to do.

Another challenge is that in Ghana people usually do not care about time. This is a challenge that confronts both lecturers and students in the teaching and learning process. When students are late for classes it may be possible that they were kept in the previous lecture by the lecturer, but in many cases the students leave their hostels late. Although policies are being put in place

to change the habitual lateness attitude of students, a comprehensive policy that aims at inculcating punctuality in the Ghanaian society, more specifically at the household level will be of immense benefit. When a child sees that his or her parents live according to time, he or she will emulate them. Similarly, when students know that the lecturer is punctual and does not tolerate lateness they may always play by the rules.

In foreign language learning, there are situations where students need some general knowledge to be able to think and communicate in the language. Knowledge, like when to say “Thank you” or what kind of wine may be served with a beefsteak or how to appreciate other cultures can mostly be brought from the home or family. However in a number of cases students did not have the opportunity to learn from their parents or others, because they themselves do not have that knowledge since they are not well educated⁹. (*Literacy definition*: age 15 and over can read and write; *total population*: 74.8%, *male*: 82.7% *female*: 67.1%). Also, students in many cases do not cultivate the habit of reading wide for broader knowledge or entertainment where this knowledge can be obtained but rather read only what is “compulsory”. Education at the basic and secondary school levels attempts at teaching students this “useful habit”, but good examples from the family plays a significant role. According to *Soku, Nkansah Simpeh and Osafo-Adu* (2011), this problem cannot be seen in only Ghana.

The relationship between L1, L2, L3 and...

In Ghana, it is sometimes difficult to find out a person’s first language (L1) or mother tongue, especially in urban areas, where people come from different places with different languages. Thus, English is used as the lingua franca, since in many cases, when people marry, it may happen that their children will speak neither the mother’s nor the father’s language. Also, it is possible to have situations where a child was born and lived a while in a rural area and therefore could speak a native language; however as the family moved to the city, the child may no longer be able to speak that native language but rather English, simply because of the new environment. This means that although the child’s L1 was a local language, with time he or she cannot speak it.

In Ghana people learn English in two ways: as implicit and as explicit. Although it seems that there is a contradiction, we will show that, there is not. Children learn English not as a foreign language (especially in the urban areas), since English is widely spoken: as a child switches on the television there are programmes in English; in schools and other public places, at churches English will mostly be spoken. This is the implicit way of learning English. On the other hand, children in school learn new English words and grammar mostly as a foreign language vocabulary and grammar, because the use of English grammar in the Ghanaian speech is not always correct. Therefore the learnt grammar and new words serve as corrections which are done by conscious representation (explicit knowledge).

Although according to *Bardel and Falk* (2012), in Ghana the influence of L2 on L3 is significant in language learning, since the grammar of L2 is based on explicit knowledge and sustained by “declarative memory”. Therefore L2 should help in L3 learning. However in foreign language learning in the University of Ghana most of the students do struggle in language classes. This may be due to the fact that although all the students speak English, in many cases, the English language was acquired by both

⁹ Source: <http://geography.about.com/library/cia/blcghana.htm>

implicit and explicit ways. Therefore quite often it does not serve as L2 in foreign language learning. On the other hand, it is important to note that, those who studied French in school may use that as L2 in the learning of a new foreign language, even if it was not the L2 in the person's life, but L3, L4 etc. Thus, although in the University almost all students are multilingual, in our opinion, most of the language learners do not have the positive impact of English language on the learning process of the new foreign language simply because the official language of the country was not fully acquired as L2.

Attitude towards languages

In Ghana the debate on Language Policy goes on and on. As noted above, the official language in Ghana is the English language. Children must speak it in schools and they are sometimes punished if they use another language. Some local Ghanaian languages are taught in schools, but the generally used school language is English. In many schools, French as foreign language is taught and therefore most children can speak two or three languages.

As *Owu-Ewie* (2006) summarized, from time to time different language policy has been implemented. Some researchers believe that it is important to use local languages as a medium of instructions in the first years of primary schools, while others find it difficult to use local languages as a medium of instruction in schools. Different reasons have been given. One reason is that if children are allowed to use local languages at the lower primary schools, they will not have enough time to master their English before the secondary school. Another reason is that in some disciplines it will be difficult to find a qualified teacher, who can teach a particular subject in a local language, while in some parts of the country the high number of local languages is making it difficult to choose which of them should be used in schools.

However some studies have demonstrated that a student can acquire a second language better if he or she has a high proficiency level in his or her first language (Lewelling, 1991). Perhaps in the Ghanaian society the debate on language policy is also reflected in the attitude towards foreign languages.

According to *Inal et al.* (2010) a student's attitude toward a studied foreign language is very important, because there is a correlation between the student's performance and attitude. Regarding the gender of the language learners *Soku et al.* (2011) noted that female students appreciate English and French better than male students. They also demonstrated that science students have better attitude towards language learning than students doing Arts or Business. There is not any correlation between the student's attitude toward foreign languages and parents' education.

Inal et al. (2010) established a connection between the students' mothers' education and the attitude of students toward foreign languages. Specifically, they found that children of highly educated mothers have more positive attitude towards a foreign language. There are interesting results on the correlation between the fathers' educational background and children's attitude towards foreign languages. Students whose father has university degree have less positive attitude than those whose father has graduated from high school.

Some surveys have been conducted on bilingual children and their attitude toward foreign languages. Interestingly, different surveys have reported different results. The bilingual children have very positive attitude toward foreign languages. *Inal et al.* (2010) indicated that they did not find

any significantly positive attitude. In our opinion the attitude depends on the foreign language itself and it should not be generalized.

Relationship between the number of students in a class and productivity

As earlier noted, the University of Ghana is characterised by large class sizes and consequently high student lecturer ration. Even though from the 2010/2011 academic year a new program and policy on class sizes was introduced which sought to reduce class sizes, tutorials classes are still large and need to be reduced. According to *Chingos and Whitehurst* (2011), there are a number of studies on the relationship between class size and academic productivity, which can confirm that there is a relationship between smaller class sizes and better academic performance, especially at the lower level. In the University of Ghana, most of the foreign languages (Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Spanish and Swahili) are taught for beginners. In some cases the teaching process is comparable to the teaching process in lower primary classes, regardless of the age of the students and therefore requires smaller class sizes if academic productivity of language students in the University is to be improved. Moreover, in a number of cases the grammar and oral classes are inseparable, especially for beginners; therefore it is important to have more contacting hours with the lecturer. Table 3 demonstrates the number of students in a class and the average performance of first year students in the first semester of 2007/2008, 2008/2009, 2009/2010 academic years.

Table 3. *Number of students in class and performance of first year students in first semester of 2007/2008, 2008/2009, 2009/2010 academic years*

Subject Academic year	Number of students	Beginning Russian (Grammar)	Pronunciation and basic reading skills (Oral)
2007/2008	80	58.7	58.99
2008/2009	55	58.6	62.4
2009/2010	22	67.54	65.09

(Source: Author's data, 2007-2010)

As seen in Table 3, students' performance in both grammar and oral examination significantly improved when the class size was reduced. Specifically, average performance in grammar slightly reduced in 2008/2009 compared to 2007/2008 but improved significantly in 2009/2010. Average performance in orals has improved from about 58.99 percent in 2007/2008 to about 65.09 percent in 2009/2010. It is important to note that, in 2009/2010 academic year during lectures and tutorials, apart from the Textbook a new Workbook was introduced. However, the difference in students' performance was significant and therefore we believe that both the reduction in class size and the introduction of the new workbook contributed to the increase in performance of the students.

Good ways of taking students through the first lessons

As evidenced from the forgoing discussions, the situation of foreign language students and lecturers of the University of Ghana is not easy. To achieve academic success both students and lecturers should work very hard. Unfortunately, the library is not well resourced with materials that can enhance teaching and learning.

In order to assist fresh students in all language courses, faculties and students do organise special orientation programme for them. In the Russian Section it is mostly organised by the members of the Russian Club. (There is a general negative attitude of students toward Russian language. Some Russian language students are discouraged because of this attitude to the extent that they do not want to go for any extra curricula activities. Unfortunately, they realised the mistakes they are making mostly when it is too late and sometimes fail their examinations.) The programme is usually organised a few weeks after the first classes and therefore it is important for lecturers to undertake some orientation during the first lectures to enable students appreciate the course from the beginning. A very good way of improving students moral is to continue orientation-counselling throughout the whole academic year for beginners. This can be done, because the number of students in the language Departments is smaller compared to other Departments in the Humanities. (The smaller class size was accepted due to the practical nature of language teaching.) Using this approach, a natural student – lecturers' communication link is established during and after lectures, which helps to build a better relationship and mentorship between the students and lecturers. The Club activities should also be enhanced since they provide opportunities for less formal communication between students and lecturers.

Furthermore, it is important for lecturers to make their lectures not only interesting, but practical as well. Our experience suggest that if after the first lecture, fifty out of seventy students will be able to say the following in Russian, they cultivate the idea that they can learn the language which boosts their morals:

“Good Morning! / Good Afternoon!”

“Hello!”

“My Name is....”

“What is your name?”

“His/her name is ...”

“What is his/her name?”

“Nice to meet you”

“She is a young lady.”

“He is a young man.”

“Good bye.”

“Bye, bye.”

The challenges of achieving this objective are the large class sizes, which easily exhaust a lecturer. However, the gains from such an effort are the motivation that students obtain to learn the language even in situations where they are not in the best of moods. The above discussions do not hold if the class size is less than thirty students. In such a case some Russian speech etiquette can be introduced as well.

Another important challenge is that students do not know how to read and write Russian alphabets. What makes the writing even a bigger challenge for Ghanaian students is that some of them cannot imagine how letters can be joined in writing. Although in Ghanaian schools students are taught how to

join letters, they are not encouraged and obliged do that. Therefore, Ghanaian students really struggle when they are writing in Russian. Many experts can attest to the fact that joining of Russian alphabets in writing is easier and faster, even though there are some peculiarities. In order not to scare students it is advisable that writing is introduced only after some weeks of introductory lessons.

Soon after students have had their first class they could be introduced to borrowed words from English. Since in our university students speak English, we use words such as office, manager, assistant etc. (Useinova, 2000). The challenge is that, some students take it for granted and begin to think that Russian is similar to English and consequently they may not put enough effort in its learning. (At the end of the 2011/2012 academic year a student could not read at all during oral examinations. The examiner wanted to give her a pass so she changed the language of the examination from Russian into English and asked the student if she knows some Russian words. The student was happy because at least she understood the questions and mentioned Russian words such as office, manager...)

Students of Russian studies have problem with reading. To help them practising songs could be introduced as soon as they can read the letters. Although in foreign language teaching songs are mostly used for children who cannot read, it has proved to be effective in young adult classes. In the teaching of Russian language in Ghana, this is more effective since in the life of Ghanaians, music and songs play a significant role. When they are happy, they sing and dance. When they are sad, they do the same thing.

In Russian there are a lot of songs which can be used during language classes. Based on our more than ten years of experience in teaching Russian language to Ghanaian young adult beginners we can say that, some Russian children's songs are really helpful. When Russian adults are asked to remember any song, most of them will recall a Russian song from their childhood. This is because of their catchy melody and simple verses. Therefore in the teaching of Russian language, Russian children's songs should be introduced as soon as possible. They really help in reading practice, especially when students record them, for example on their phone and use them while reading the verses. There is a song about an island, where there is always summer. (The song says that Chunga Changa is a magic island and it is a very nice place; it is good to live there, and there is always sunshine and bananas...¹⁰) That is the favourite of the students. While teaching Russian numerals, it may also be good to teach a song about them. There is one, which really helps in memorising the numbers (the song is about multiplication table¹¹).

How to help students to appreciate the language and culture

As discussed earlier the contact hours for the teaching of the language are enough neither for the students to be able to study Russian language effectively nor for the lecturers to give adequate background information about the language and the culture of the peoples who speak it. Therefore students are encouraged to join the Russian Club and participate in its activities. Apart from these, there are one or two programmes monthly where interesting Russian films with English subtitles are shown. From time to time, officials from the Russian Embassy are invited to have interaction with the students. In 2012, students from the university were invited to the annual

¹⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWGovsuRWYM>

¹¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5DPEg1lp3s>

official party of the Russian Embassy. For some students, that was a great opportunity to see how people from different cultures do relax and socialise. The selected students were very proud and it served as a motivation. Some time ago a “Russian cuisine” was organised where students had the opportunity to try Russian food prepared by the Chef of the Russian Embassy and some lecturers of the Department while having unofficial conversation with the Embassy officials. (The Ghanaian cuisine differs from the Russian one. Although in the textbook there is a topic on food, students were very excited when they ate *pelmeni*, *beetroot salad* and Russian *pirog*.)

Conclusion

In this article, we discussed the attitude towards Russian language teaching and learning in the University of Ghana which is generally negative and the challenges that faces both instructors and learners. Our analysis suggests that the poor attitude towards the language influences students’ psychology and performance in class. Challenges that instructors face include explicate way of acquiring the English language (the lingua franca) which makes it difficult for students to use it as L2, imposition of course on students for which they do not have interest, the quest by parents and relatives to see their wards obtain a marketable degrees, freedom from parental controls associated with campus life, the large class sizes that makes it difficult to have enough practical sessions and to some extent lateness to class, among others.

Under such circumstances, it is not easy to motivate students who are learning the language. It is for this reason that lecturers should not only lecture but rather mentor and provide advice to the students as well as making the course interesting and practical. This together with extra curricula activities, organized by the Russian Club is the sure way of motivating students to appreciate Russian language and the culture, and consequently completing the four year course – in some cases due to the year abroad” programme, it can even be five years.

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