

Getting Information from Russian-Language Internet Sites by Chinese Students Studying at Saint Petersburg State University

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Abstract-This article is devoted to the research of the need of Chinese students studying at different faculties of St. Petersburg State University in obtaining information from the Russian-language Internet sites. The research method is a survey through the Google Forms website.

The study showed that Chinese students in Russia receive information about the world mainly from the Internet sources. Almost all students turn to Russian-language sites for information, and more than two thirds do it frequently. The study made it possible to identify goals and reasons for access to the Russian-language Internet sites, names of popular sites, issues of concern and difficulties that students experience in reading Internet texts.

The paper concludes that the Russian- language Internet is of a great importance in the life of Chinese students in Russia. Teachers of the Russian language should use it more actively as a tool of teaching the language and take into account special features of Internet texts when making teaching aids, as well as particular aspects of perception of information from Internet sites when teaching reading and listening to foreign students.

Keywords-*information needs, Chinese students, Russian-language internet sites, Saint Petersburg State University, survey*

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays more and more attention is paid to processes related to information activities. Information is the key area of human cognitive activity. Every modern person consumes a large amount of information flows due to the rapid development of information technology.

Information need is an individual need to obtain information that ensures adaptation, comfortable social self-awareness or performance of practical tasks.

The concept of information need introduced by R.S. Taylor in the 1960-s [1] has been actively studied in the last 20 years, which proves its relevance in the information age [2, 3, 4]. The structure of information needs includes (a) organic (biogenic) need in sensory information, which is essential for living beings, just like exchange of matter and energy; (b) cultural need in social information; (c) professional need in scientific and technical information [4: 13].

The second and the third needs are critical for a proper organization of teaching Russian to Chinese students in Russian universities. When selecting educational materials, teachers need to know what kind of information foreign student need and what information they are interested in. For example, when teaching reading Russian Internet texts it is required to know whether Chinese students access the Russian-language Internet sites at all and what information they read on these sites. It is the focus of this paper.

II. METHODS OF RESEARCH

The goal of the research is to study the need of Chinese students in Russia in obtaining information from the Russian-language Internet sites.

The research method is a survey of Chinese students at different faculties of St. Petersburg State University. Respondents answered a questionnaire through the Google Forms website (<https://googl/forms/RxcJriYdf3gsS5qD3>), which included 11 questions:

1. What resources do you use to get information?
2. Do you turn to Russian sites for information?
3. How often do you access Russian-language sites?
4. If you use Russian-language sites, why do you do it?
5. What is the purpose of your access to Russian-language sites?
6. Materials of what Russian-language newspapers do you read most often?
7. What are the issues you are keen on?
8. Information about which countries you are most interested in?
9. What difficulties do you encounter when reading Internet texts in Russian?
10. Do you think it is necessary to teach Chinese students to read Internet texts in Russian?
11. If so, why?

The questionnaire generally had closed questions with multiple choice answers, or closed-open questions, where

one of the answers could be formulated by the respondent. Apart from answers to those questions, the respondents were asked to indicate their age and level of education.

The survey was made in the first semester of the 2018/19 academic year. In total, 51 Chinese students took part in it, 43 of them were female (84.3%) and 8 were male (15.7%). Among them there were 17 undergraduate students (33.3%), 28 graduate students of Master's degree program (54.9%) and 6 post-graduate students (11.8%).

III. RESEARCH RESULTS

In order to fully understand the information preferences of Chinese students, we recommend first checking each of the questions raised in the survey.

Answers to the question about the sources of information showed that 77.1% of respondents use, mainly, the Internet, 14.4% - print publications (books, newspapers and magazines), 8.5% - radio and television. However, even those who consider print publications, radio and television as the main source of information still use the Internet.

94.1% of respondents (almost everybody) turn to Russian-language sites for information, which enables teachers to use the Internet more intensely in teaching Russian to Chinese students; 70.6% of respondents visit Russian sites often, and 29.4% of respondents do this rarely.

This may indicate several factors:

- high level of proficiency in Russian;
- current advances in online translation of Russian-language sites;
- high level of information provided on Russian-language sites.

Reasons for Chinese students to access Russian-language websites are the following:

- obtaining information from websites is faster than from print publications (32.2%);
- it's more convenient, there is no need to go anywhere (22.5%);
- printed books are outdated (9%);
- not all books (textbooks) are available in printed versions (15.7%);
- you can find information that is not available in Chinese (21%)

Thus, according to Chinese students, Internet sources are more efficient, because information can be obtained faster and in a better way.

Answers to the question about the purpose why Chinese students turn to Russian-language sites showed that 48.5% of respondents look for thesis materials on Russian-language sites; 19.5% are keen on watching movies and 16.2% - on reading online newspapers; 15.8% of

respondents make purchases in online stores. The first figure (48.5%) is twice as big as the second and the third one which demonstrates that Chinese students take their studies very seriously and are results-oriented.

Students who read online newspapers most often refer to the Russian-language website of the "Long Bao" newspaper (45.1%) and the "Russia Today" website (35.3%), among these students 56% of respondents are interested in social issues (a wide range of relevant issues), 21% in economics and 23% in politics. Most of them are interested in China (42.5%), the relationships between China and Russia take the second place (29.4%). Next goes Russia (26.5%) and, marginally, the United States (1.6%). Thus, most of Chinese students who study in Russia are concerned with events happening in their homeland and in Russia, the country of their study. This also shows that Chinese students are open-hearted towards Russia and are interested in good relations between our peoples.

When reading online texts, many Chinese students experience lexical (46.4%), grammatical (15%) and phraseological (38.6%) difficulties. This is probably why 62.7% of Chinese students consider it necessary to be taught to read Internet texts in Russian. This is consistent with the opinion expressed by Chinese educationalists [5].

More than half of respondents (57.2%) believe that reading Internet texts will increase their level of proficiency in Russian, while 42.8% of respondents noted that it allows them to find the necessary information more quickly and conveniently than in printed books.

We can conclude that with the use of Internet, Chinese students can achieve several positive points at once:

- write a high-quality dissertation;
- to join the Russian culture;
- learn a language;
- learn some idioms and some difficult words, etc.

IV. CONCLUSION

The survey of Chinese students at different faculties of St. Petersburg State University obtained answers to all questions in the questionnaire. The study proved the assumption that Chinese students receive information about the world mainly through the Internet sources. Ultimately, this is due to the fact that each student has a laptop and a smart-phone.

Almost all respondents turn to Russian-language sites for information; and more than two thirds of students do this regularly. It enables the teachers to use the Internet more actively as a tool of teaching Russian and take into account special features of Internet texts when making teaching aids, as well as particular aspects of perception of information from Internet sites when teaching foreign students reading and listening.

The reasons why Chinese students access the Internet sources are mainly pragmatic: the speed of obtaining information, its availability, convenient search and use. Apart from that, Russian-language Internet sites contain information that cannot be found in Chinese.

Almost half of respondents use the Russian-language Internet to search for materials for the thesis, but many watch Russian films and read online newspapers, with the Russian-language website of “Long Bao” newspaper and the “Russia Today” (RT) website being the most popular. In addition, more than half of the students surveyed are interested in a wide range of issues concerning Russian society rather than in politics or economics. They are mainly interested in what the Russian mass media write about China, how they treat China and the Chinese, how relations between Russia and China are developing. This results from their life in Russia, which depends on the attitude of the Russians towards the Chinese, and on the status of Russian-Chinese relations. At the same time, only one fourth of respondents are interested in Russia per se, and almost no one is interested in information about the United States. All these data shows the teachers of Russian a strategy on how to select educational materials: the most popular Russian-language sites, topics of Internet texts, issues for discussion.

Also, the survey showed that while reading Internet texts in Russian, many Chinese students experience difficulties in understanding vocabulary, grammar and phraseology. This again proves the need for a focused work in teaching Chinese students to read online texts. Nearly two thirds of respondents consider it necessary to undergo a special training in reading Internet texts in Russian, because with the rapid development of the Internet the popularity of Russian in various websites is very high, people can master some basic Russian knowledge at a fairly fast pace, for example: some idioms and phrases that Chinese are not familiar with. These are very good things that promote their understanding of Russian culture. In addition to this, special training will improve their Russian language skills and enable them to search for the necessary information much faster and more efficiently.

The Russian-language Internet turns out to play a critical role in the life of Chinese students at St. Petersburg State University, since it is the source of their social-psychological, linguistic and cultural adaptation to life in Russia, helping them to study Russian and other academic courses and write graduation qualifying papers.

The results of the study should be taken into account while teaching Russian to Chinese students.

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