

Multilingualism and Multiculturalism in Russian Higher Education from Language Teaching Perspective

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Abstract. This article promotes the idea of fostering the resources of the multicultural and multilingual environment in the Russian tertiary education which leads to forming a competitive multilingual personality. The detailed analysis of bilingual educational and institutional space at the faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences of St.Petersburg State University and the foreign languages teaching practices which embrace a multilingual approach as perceived by the teachers and students offers a new insight into the benefits and challenges of the educational potential of multilingualism.

Keywords – multilingualism, multiculturalism, bilingualism, English/Russian as media of instruction, foreign language teaching, multilingual personality*.

I. INTRODUCTION

The last decades have seen significant linguistic, cultural and demographic changes in population as a result of globalization, transnational migration, changes in the political and economic situation in different regions of the world. As a result, multilingualism as adding one or more languages to the person's native language and the ability to use them to perform concrete communicative tasks is becoming an indispensable attribute of citizens of the world. Naturally the higher education has got involved by studying the challenges and benefits of multilingualism and multiculturalism, but most importantly by forming 'multilingual personalities' who are able to live and work in the new multicultural world community.

This article promotes the need to substantively assess and foster the multicultural and multilingual reality of the Russian system of tertiary education. The description of the multilingual and multicultural environment of St.Petersburg State University (hereinafter SPbU) based on the ongoing study in the field and updated in 2019 well reflects the multinational situation in the leading universities of Russia. The introduction of English along with Russian as a medium of instruction and institutional communication has already made the top universities at least bilingual. The faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences (hereinafter FLAS), where we teach, serves as a perfect object for a detailed study of how the Russian/English bilingual educational space functions and benefits learning; how the focus on the linguistic and cultural diversity can raise multilingual and

multicultural awareness of the students and the staff; what is being done to use and develop the linguistic repertoires of multilinguals in foreign language teaching.

The reforms should make current system of language education an integral part of the Russian higher education. The trend towards democratization and humanization make language education directly responsible for the formation of an all-rounded personality adaptive to the multilingual environment. Another tendency involves a shift from teaching foreign languages only as a means of communication to using them as ways and instruments of learning and sociocultural adaptation. Obviously, the foreign languages teaching (FLT) has a direct relevance to the development of the students' multicultural awareness, but the impact could be more significant in achieving a broader range of educational goals. On the one hand, the role of the language is closely connected with creating meanings, developing cognitive abilities of the learners. On the other, the language is deeply rooted in its culture. At the same time, the language can be subjected to linguistic and sociocultural changes due to the cross-cultural interference, as it is happening to English as a lingua franca under the influence of non-native speakers' usage of it.

Learning a foreign language can provide students with knowledge about both foreign and their own national cultures as well as give them a better understanding of their native language. Moreover, language proficiency level is held responsible for the success of communication and building social and business contacts. So the teaching a foreign language in interaction with other languages and cultures in a multilingual environment of the university looks promising. It also deserves further research, which it just started here.

Hypothesis: Multilingualism has a positive effect on foreign language learning. Multilinguals have higher receptive and productive skills based on the comparative knowledge of at least two language systems and are better at international interactions due to multicultural competence. The learning outcomes can be enhanced by the existing multilingual educational environment in leading Russian universities.

Research goals and objectives:

- to confirm the multinational and multilingual status of the Russian university student body;
- to understand how multilingualism and multiculturalism impact teaching and learning foreign languages;

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- describe the FLAS practices which provide an escape from exclusive monolingualism and lead to inclusive multilingualism;
- to evaluate the willingness and readiness of students and teachers to use multilingualism and multiculturalism in language learning as well as apply the multilingual competency in everyday and business communication;
- to find the attitude of students to their own multilingualism, which is commonly being overlooked.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The concept of ‘multicultural educational environment’ is the creation of a multicultural society that is viewed not as a solidified mosaic of cultures, but a product of complex intercultural interactions that influence the existence and development of an individual culture [5], [21]. It ascertains the acceptance and equality of all the cultures allowing adherence to one’s own culture and benefit from combining different cultures without fully adopting them [1].

Multilingualism has become a trial for the national educational systems which face diversification in their linguistic educational landscapes resulting from a massive inflow of learners with different language and cultural backgrounds. In case of Russia they come from abroad as well as represent the non-dominant ethnic language groups of its different regions and republics. It leads to the necessity for them to communicate in several languages because their native languages are not applicable in the universities they study at [15]. Multilinguals surpass monolinguals, because the languages they know make them more resourceful and better adaptive to different, national or work, cultures. Grosjean and Valdes argue that a bilingual or multilingual person’s communicative competence differs from a monolingual’s [14]. Multilingual speakers shift between the languages and use them according to their communication needs and to the extent that the communication situation or social discourse require [12], [17]. Blommaert argues that the multilingualism of such learners should not be seen as a collection of languages that a speaker controls, but rather as a complex of specific semiotic resources built into their multilingual repertoires with acquiring another language and embracing a whole range of linguistic varieties, cultural means (style, genre) and social means that influence the norms of language perception and production [2].

This should gradually lead to reconsidering educational approaches to account for the learners’ cultural and language specifics [8], [9]. Language is integrated with culture which presupposes the necessity of the learner’s acquaintance with the target culture to learn and comprehend the target language and attain the native-like proficiency in it [1]. However, some researchers argue that it can be very difficult to fully understand the target culture without being conscious of learners’ own culture and taking it into account in FLT [14], [17]. European scholars support the proactive and strategic use of learners’ first languages and the inclusion of culture embedded tasks to give learners equal access to higher conceptual and cognitive tasks. Moreover, if learners are confronted with the target culture only, which happens when they study the global course books, they get

easily confused with the cultural contexts and cannot concentrate on the language learning and production [16], [18]. Blommaert and Boriboont argue that it is hard to make language function productively if it does not provide local meanings and refer the comprehension difficulties to the disparity between learners’ daily experiences and needs and the cultural contexts they study the language in [2], [3].

The ample number of theoretical studies require account for globalization and international integration [6], [8], [13], [19], so university students are expected to advance their skills in the languages of international education (Russian and English for Russian universities). The detailed description of language verbal competences is presented in the *Common European Framework of Reference* (2017). The sociocultural competence and mediation skills presented in this document are essential to every intercultural interaction [7]. The methods of integrating universal and culture-specific aspects of communicative approach with a view of fulfilling pragmatic goals in the multicultural conditions of teaching a foreign language in a Russian higher education institution are also being discussed in the national pedagogical studies [4], [21].

The research on multilingual language teaching practices focuses mainly on bilingualism and the second language learning (L2). These findings could be applied to FLT, since they study the multilingual competency development and explore different aspects of multilingual and multicultural interaction in the learner-oriented education that provide an important communicative and culture-specific support for multilingual students and teachers [6], [9], [12], [13]. For example, FLT practices are obviously biased to the monolingual approach in teaching the target language. Most of the assignments are limited by rather superficial tasks focused on the target culture or sociocultural aspects of communication and seldom offer an insight into the mechanisms of constructing and transmitting the meaning from L1 or the tacit knowledge of multiple language and culture interactions [3], [8], [9], [20], [23]. The implicit metalinguistic knowledge and skills which can be drawn upon when studying another language are being neglected. Cummins defines it as ‘common underlying proficiency’ and proves that it can provide the base for the development of both L1 and L2 as well as have a beneficial effect on learning additional languages [9].

This leads us to a preliminary conclusion that it is time to move away from producing dominant language native-speaker clones with complexes about their accents, grammatical or lexical imperfections, but rather equip learners with an ability to competently code switch between languages, encourage multilingual interactions with native and non-native speakers. But first they should receive enough exposure to different language modes, a variety of accents, culture-specific contexts and ways of behavior that will eventually build a unique multilingual personality. So the methods of developing multilingual competence and seeking ways to create a multicultural environment are still to be discovered, and foreign language learning can become the springboard.

III. METHOD

The reasons to choosethe faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences as an object to studythe impact of the multilingual and multicultural environmentin Russian higher educationwere its manageable size for the focused study (Fig.1); liberal education principles such as interdisciplinarity, interactive teaching methods, individually chosen educational paththat make the faculty more eager to adapt newapproaches to teaching; and most importantly, its bilingualism due to the double-degree program and the partnership with Bard College, USA.

First, to justify the feasibility of multilingual approach in university language teachingit was vital to dispel the myth about the uniform composition of Russian universities' students who are believed to possess a homogeneous social and cultural background. Based on the statistical and empirical data collected from the official sources and recentpublications of the Center for Sociological Researchof the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation [10], SPbU and FLAS admissions offices reports, we managed to obtain an overview of the multinational and polyethnic composition of the university student body and relying on these data draw attention to the fact thatthe multilingual and multicultural reality of the leading Russian universities generallyremain an underestimated resource.

Second, an extensive preliminary research was conducted to find out how enthusiastic and prepared theuniversity language teachers were to introduce multilingual and multicultural methodology in FLT and check their awareness of the resources which multilingualism and multiculturalism can bring to FLTpractices. Valuable datawere received during informal teachers' meetings, brainstorming sessions and more formal debates, panel discussions and round tables at seminars, webinars and conferences, which allowed attracting not only teachers working in language programs at FLAS, but also colleagues and researchers from other faculties and universities in Russia, the USA, and Europe. We encouraged language teachers to reflect about their own cultural heritage and language repertoire and share in building a collection of co-learning language tasks and ideas for cross-cultural assignments and projects. These data will be presented here only partially to support the hypothesis and show the leading role of the faculty in shaping the multilingual personality and creating the suitable educational space.

Third, central to this research was a qualitative and quantitative analysisof the students' language repertoire andtheir experience of multilingual and multicultural approaches at FLAS. The students' feedback was collected by means of regular evaluation forms, language competency self-evaluations and a specially developed questionnaire, then tabulated and systematized.The learning outcomes were assessed by traditional progress and final tests.

The FLAS students complete course evaluation forms. In case of language courses and intensive programs, students fill them out twice - at the beginning and the end of the course, tofind out individual aims and needs of studying the language and to enable students to self-assess their own linguistic strengths and weakness, because standardized

placement tests cannot reveal all these details. Applying quantitative methods to the analysis of the answers to the close-ended multiple choice questions, the teachers and the administration can evaluate the popularity of the course, the teaching methods and course materials, the level of students' satisfaction with their achievements of the given course. More importantly, the language course evaluation forms include open-ended questions and a space for comments after the Linkert grading scale. The analysis of the answers showsthe changes in the students' attitude to the purpose of the foreign language and the evaluation of their linguistic abilities and skills after taking alanguage course at FLAS.

Also for this study two similar in content questionnaires have been created to match the specifics of two groups of students studying at the faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences of SPbGU: (Gr1) Russian-speakers and (Gr2) foreigners - the exchange students coming to SPbU to study Russian as a foreign language and the bachelor degree program students. The 12 item questionnaire included 3 open-ended questions and 3 questions with an option to leave a comment or offer a different, more relevant answer. The 12 questions were divided into four categories: (1) Russian/English as the media of instruction and means of international communication, (2) learning environment and motivation, (3) linguistic repertoire, (4) foreign language use. They were meant to find out the languages the students know (the level of proficiency, purposes and communicative situations) to establish if the assumption of their initial multilingualism was correct and study the learner's awareness of their linguistic repertoire and the multilingual practices provided by the language environment at the university and beyond.

The questionnaires were distributed at the end of the spring semester 2019. Group 1: 72 students from Byelorussia, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, China, Indonesia enrolled in the *English B1-B2* course (8 hours a week) received the link to the online form of the questionnaire. The return rate was 81.9% (59 responses collected). Group 2 was offered to fill out the paper forms of the questionnaire in class. There were 5 respondents from the Bachelor degree program studying in Russian and enrolled in *English B1-B2* and 36 responses from the students of *Russian* (12-14 hours a week): 21 American students form Bard College, 12 European and 3 Asian students (China, Taiwan, Turkey) whose Russian language proficiency levels ranged from B1 to C1. The Gr2 respondents were between 20 and 23 years old, while the Bachelor students were 17-19. Among the Gr2 respondents there were 2 people with hereditary Russian and 2 students who spent two semesters at FLAS. The student from Indonesia studied in the Teacher's training institute at Krasnodar for a year, the Chinese undergraduate student took a preparatory Russian course at SPbU. These facts were taken into account, since they had more experience in Russian higher education system, which influenced their answers.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Multiculturalism and polyethnicity of a Russian university

A student contingent of a Russian university still tends to be considered homogenous, becauseits members have

common historical and sociocultural heritage, mentality, use the same official language. Yet the Russian Federation is a multinational and polyethnic state, where the national identities of its many peoples are officially recognized and cherished. Educational programs aimed to preserve and develop the languages and cultures of the minority and ethnic groups living in Russia receive support from the federal and local governments. 37 languages out of almost 150 spoken on the territory of Russia received a status of the official republican languages. Children not only speak their mother tongues at home, but have an opportunity to study them and on them at the republican or local schools. Besides people are encouraged to learn about the cultures and languages of the people who live next to them. Although in higher education most students choose to study in Russian or English to broaden their educational opportunities, their linguistic and cultural diversity is becoming more visible now and demands due recognition and appreciation.

Moreover, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the former soviet republics started to recreate and strengthen their national identities, based among other factors on the development of their national languages and cultures. As a result, students who now come to study at Russian universities (about 79% of foreign students are from the former CIS and the Baltic states, most of them are citizens of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Belarus [11], [19]) speak the national languages of their countries, but also demonstrate a good command of Russian. Since the bonds of the former soviet republics and the Eastern European states with the Russian Federation are still strong and active, fueled by their international economic and political relations, most students from among compatriots living abroad are also fluent in Russian because of their Russian roots. Moreover, heritage speakers and many foreign nationals from the bordering countries see the potential of using Russian to build their international future career. In fact, such students are multilinguals, having in the linguistic repertoire their native language, Russian and English as languages of international communication.

Another argument for the development of the multilingual educational space can be found in the strategic plans of the Russian universities aimed at increasing their world rankings to export Russian education and science to the global market. At the moment they readily invest in the international academic mobility of the Russian students and the teaching staff, and invite foreign lecturers to work with Russian students. In 2018, 733 foreign students participated in the academic mobility programs of SPbU. Almost 96% of them came as part of exchange programs between SPbU and its partner universities. Eventually the top Russian universities aspire to attract foreign students to choose their degree programs, the Russian language and culture programs and online courses and become truly multilingual.

In 2016/2017, the number of foreign students in Russian tertiary education reached 230,000, which was 20% more than in 2014/2015, and the tendency remains steady [11]. St.Petersburg State University holds the second place among Russian universities by the number of foreign students, 9.99% of the total in 2018/2019 academic year.

Most foreign students usually come from China, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine - 773, 207, and 102 respectively last year. In 2018, first students from Vietnam, Colombia, Singapore, Tunisia, Serbia and Zambia enrolled in SPbU.

Table 1 shows the total number of undergraduate students who studied full-time in a Bachelor program in 2018/2019 academic year, in October 2018, in all Russian state universities, at SPbU and FLAS respectively.

TABLE 1. FOREIGN STUDENTS STUDYING IN THE BACHELOR DEGREE PROGRAM IN ALL RUSSIAN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, IN SPBGU AND FLAS IN 2018/2019

2018/2019	Total number of undergraduate students, persons, 4 years	Share of foreign students, %	Number of countries of origin
Higher Educational Institutions of Russia	92 000	5	150
St.Petersburg State University	8 357	9,99	65
Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences	507	2	7
Russian as a Foreign Language Program at FLAS	116*	100	17*

* Figures for 2018/2019 academic year only. Foreign students come on short-term programs, their number at FLAS is on average the same each academic year, but the number of countries may vary between 15 and 21.

These data can prove the validity of the findings received while surveying the multilingual educational space of FLAS and SPbU to the Russian higher education in general. The number of foreign students who studied at FLAS in the Russian as a Foreign Language program is also given here, since all of them are simultaneously enrolled in the FLAS curriculum courses, therefore, should be considered as part of the multinational composition of the FLAS students.

Multilingualism at the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences Teachers' perception

The Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences strives to reach the high standards of quality international education, somultilingualism and multiculturalism have long been in its agenda. The Faculty has a longstanding well-established partnership with Bard College, USA. This partnership supports bilingualism at the faculty where English and Russian are the approved languages of interinstitutional communication.

The fact that the students at FLAS are enrolled in a double degree program motivates them to advance in their English proficiency and encourages both the faculty and the administration to work on creating a truly bilingual education environment at all levels: teaching, learning, research, interpersonal and institutional communication. There is an offering of courses in English (more than 20% of the curriculum). Among the elective language courses are French, German, Italian, Arabic, and Russian. In addition, the Faculty invites foreign lectures and researchers to give lectures and workshops and to participate in joint research and teaching methodology projects. The lectures are presented in the language of the speaker. In case of English, the translation is not required. When the lecture is in French, German or Italian, the FLAS professors are quite able to act as interpreters. Their example inspires students. During the

guest lectures students ask questions and are involved in discussions by using all their linguistic resources, and later they double their efforts to improve their foreign language competency.

The expansion of academic and creative collaboration between Russian and foreign universities, academic and cultural institutions, professors, researchers, and the creative minds is implemented through the work of ten research centers and laboratories which operate at FLAS. International conferences related to eight majors taught at FLAS and various artistic events take place more often than monthly. This supports the integration of students and the faculty in the international intellectual space. It is also an opportunity for both students and the staff to practice foreign languages and participate in multinational interactions.

There is also a student academic exchange organized by SPbU and Bard College. Annually 20 to 30 undergraduate students are competitively selected to go to study at Bard College for a semester as part of the PIE (Partnership International Exchange). Academic mobility gives students an important experience of learning the foreign language through immersion: a 24/7 contact with the target language and culture in the academic and everyday discourse.

The language teachers at FLAS had an opportunity to study the results of language immersion for two groups of university students: (1) Russian students going to Bard College on a 3 week summer intensive English language program (BESLI, which is going to be modified from a FLT course into a CLIL type of program in summer 2019 to shift the focus to a science subject study through English as an L2) and (2) American students enrolled in a 3 week summer intensive program (SLI) to study the Russian language. Up to 15 students take part in BESLI. There are 20-25 Russian SLI program participants with a tendency to grow to 35.

The uniqueness of the study is that teachers can observe Russian students (GR1) before and up to 3-5 years after their participation in BESLI and compare their language proficiency with the students who receive their FLT and practice their languages within the university domain where multilingual space is created artificially. The immersion of the SLI students (GR2) is supervised and managed by the FLAS staff, peer tutors, and host families. The results of the progress are usually assessed immediately. Their further progress is not followed, unless there are comments from the faculty at Bard. The fact that the number of SLI students is growing proves the quality of FLT at FLAS and the efficiency of its methods and learning environment based on constant interactions with the FLAS students and faculty.

BESLI and SLI participants are 17-20 and 19-24 respectively. Some researchers claim that adult learners are poor at second-language (L2) learning [13]. In comparison to the early age language acquisition it is probably true, but the results we got show that the strong motivation to learn L2 for academic or professional communication or in view of immigration combined with language immersion and intensive interactions with native and non-native peers by means of L2 provide a notable increase in language competency and intensify cultural awareness.

The progress assessment of the language proficiency results conducted as a test on the completion of the intensive language programs has proved once again that immersed language learning provides tacit knowledge of the language use and is characterized by the intuitive development of the language skills. It seriously boosts the vocabulary range. Picking up collocations and colligations in real life contexts makes the use of the L2 more natural. Phonologically correct and appropriate in oral speech intonation modes appear, especially if the learner is an audial. At the same time the results in L2 accuracy were less satisfactory, since language was learned not only in the classroom with qualified language instructors, but in a real-life language interaction with native speakers. The acquired fluency often happened at the expense of grammatical accuracy and the knowledge of important language system rules. For example, Russian learners had most mistakes in the noun declension and the use of prepositions. The results of the test (1) proved our assumption that the effective language code-switch requires knowledge and mastery of the L2 grammar, syntax, and semantics. After students undergo an almost complete code switch to L2, it usually results in (2) a temporary inhibition of L1 right after the students come back home; (3) a definitely better L2 semantic fluency in comparison to that of the students restricted to the classroom study of L2 in their home environment.

Careful consideration and respect to the cultural heritage and linguistic repertoire of all university students should become another essential prerequisite in favor of multilingual learning environment. Non-native students should feel that their cultures and languages are equally valid and valued even if they choose to study in a bilingual educational space which balances between the Russian language/Russian culture and the English language/Anglo-American culture. Teachers and administrators should explore every possibility to incorporate the different cultural backgrounds of the students into their daily teaching practice and syllabi. Also teachers should not apply their cultural stereotypes or language modes of their own L1 or the L2 they teach to judge or question the abilities of their multicultural students. For example, Japanese students are not eager to join in class discussions without being asked first. When they do speak, they usually start from the initial statement, i.e. they do not catch up from the intermediate argument offered by other students. Their written papers are rather brief, very logical, perfectly proof-read for possible mistakes and typos, and always show strong connections with the national philosophies and culture. Chinese or Indonesian students are great at drills and memorization. Their speech is very imitative. They look for models and patterns to follow. Kazakh or Kyrgyz students seldom use their native languages as a resource even in their language studies. They need the teachers' reassurance and special tasks to change this attitude, see the applicability and worth of their native language and culture in their education in Russia. Otherwise, they turn to Russian, which they know quite well or English. To sum up, students learning in a multilingual environment succeed to a greater extent than those whose first language and culture are devalued by the university and the wider society. Moreover, as the survey

showed, they broaden other students' educational horizons by offering different cultural perspectives and experiences.

Among the features fostered by the liberal education at FLAS, the ability to think critically and independently, have an open mind to accept different points of views and a possibility of multiple solutions, tolerance to diversity and creativity are vital. The study shows that they help overcome national stereotypes, find roots of prejudices and causes of national conflicts. Constant interactions between students from different regions and countries add the international perspective and personal experience to courses offered by the FLAS curriculum.

The above mentioned findings along with relevant research that shows the benefits of close cross-cultural communication and immersion in language learning are convincing enough to put an effort in developing the multilingual environment in the Russian higher education, even though it could mean creating the conditions for multilingual and multicultural interaction artificially.

Students' perspective

The student body at FLAS is multilingual. In 2018/2019 among the first year undergraduate students there were nationals from China, Indonesia, Byelorussia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan along with representatives of 30 regions of the Russian Federation, and two megalopolises – Moscow and St.Petersburg (FLAS admissions, Oct 2018). Students from the USA, Europe, Asia and the Middle East who come to FLAS to study the Russian language also take academic courses offered at the Faculty along with Russian speakers. They become an integral part of the student community. There is in average 8.8% of international students each term. If we add the Russian language program participants, their share will be 23% (see Table 1).

The distribution of foreign students who come to study Russian at FLAS is presented in the pie chart in Fig. 1. This distribution differs from the SPbU at large, where every fifth student is from China as of the current 2019.

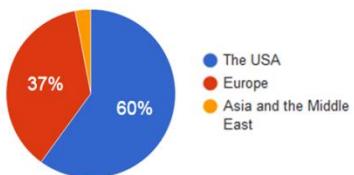


Fig.1. Distribution of students at *Russian as a Foreign Language* program by their countries of origin in 2018/2019 academic year, %

In 2018/2019 the Russian program students came from

North America:	the USA, Canada
Europe	Austria, Denmark, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Slovakia, Poland
Asia, the Middle East	China, Taiwan, Turkey

The list of the countries can be expanded by Finland, Sweden, the Republic of Korea, Japan, Iran, Ukraine, Lithuania, whose students studied at FLAS earlier.

Among the foreign students studying at FLAS along with Russian students each term there are on average 25-30 American students (3 terms a year), about 15 Europeans (both Western and Eastern Europe, 35 during the academic year), 3-5 Asian or Middle Eastern students. Students from the USA are enrolled by Bard College admissions. Students from other countries apply to SPbU directly.

Unlike Russian speaking students at FLAS, the linguistic background of Europeans is really diverse. Their knowledge of the cultures and languages of the bordering European countries is more advanced. Such multilingualism makes learning another language, even Russian, more productive for them: they have more language knowledge to refer to as well as more motivation to become multilingual. Their experience of multiculturalism in Europe accounts for a much easier adaptation to everyday life in Russia and broadmindedness about cultural and political realia. In contrast, Russian students' attitude to foreign language learning has a pure practical aims like entertainment, survival while traveling or socializing in social nets. In their comments they mentioned that knowledge of a few useful phrases were quite sufficient for their needs. Only academically bound or professionally ambitious students had an incentive to study other languages in depth. The importance of English was not doubted, of course. Asian and Middle Eastern students are mostly monolingual. Their language systems do not help much in studying Russian, but their openness to new knowledge and career prospects make them enthusiastic learners and communicants.

Today's students have different language contacts in comparison with students just twenty years ago. The number of borrowings – separate words or whole phrases from all sorts of languages in the students' active use is growing. English as the donor language is holding the top position, closely followed by French, German, Italian, Chinese, Spanish, but other languages are gaining momentum due to students' personal interest in them, broadening the geography of their travel destinations, contacts with the speakers from the bordering countries and regions, especially in case of the Russian Federation, and prospects of further studies and employment. Films, music, social media content are also popular sources of contacts with foreign languages. The necessity to read scientific literature in English and other European languages (like German for philosophy or Italian for arts and opera) is another stimulus to become polylingual. Thanks to university curriculum the interest to Latin and Greek is supported, since most of the terminology and so called international vocabulary originate in these languages.

The students' reaction to the exposure to multilingual and multicultural contexts and tasks in FLT was evaluated. In their comments students mentioned that when the tasks required them to look for lexical or grammatical analogies in L1 and L2, they got really excited when they could find them. The more similar cross-linguistic or cross-cultural assignments they got, the more confident and inquisitive they became. Their curiosity also led them to broaden the range of their search to include other languages they knew

or had some knowledge of. Although only a few foreign students were well-prepared to make thorough lexicogrammatical analysis due to their previous linguistic preparation and the language major in their home university, almost all observed students liked the tasks related to etymology, borrowings, phraseology and idioms, culture and country studies. It was also noticed that sometimes to do such tasks students grouped by the principle of their native languages common origins. For example, Turkmen, Kazakh, Kyrgyz students whose L1s belong to the Turkish language group and a Russian-speaker who knew some Tatar joined in a project to talk about national food. They were aware of the cultural similarities, but in the process of working on the project they build some knowledge of the common etymology of words.

The results of two questionnaires related to the use of Russian/English as L2 are presented in table 2.

TABLE 2. THE USE OF RUSSIAN/ENGLISH AS L2

RUSSIAN-SPEAKING STUDENTS	FOREIGN STUDENTS
How do you use English?	How do you use Russian?
Communication is minimal - 15% Conversations on general topics - 45% "Heart-to-heart conversations" - 20% To do course assignments - 15%	Communication is minimal - 20% Conversations on general topics - 75% "Heart-to-heart conversations" - 45%
How much time per day do you use English?	How much time per day do you use Russian?
Half an hour - 26% Hour - 41% Two hours or more - 33% All the time - 0%	Half an hour - 25% Hour - 25% Two hours or more - 40% All the time - 10%
Do you communicate in English with foreign students?	Do you communicate in Russian with Russian students?
Yes - 30%; No - 5% Sometimes - 30% Hardly ever - 17% Only working on the task - 11% When asked to tutor/guide - 5% No contacts with foreigners - 2%	Yes - 50% (always - 10%; often - 50%, occasionally - 40%) No - 15% Sometimes - 30% Only working on the task - 5%
If you DO NOT choose Russian for communication, what language is mostly used instead?	
English - 97,9%	English - 100%
How necessary is it to know several foreign languages?	
Absolutely necessary - 36,7% Desirable - 30% English is enough - 26,7% Not necessary - 0%	Absolutely necessary - 35% Desirable - 65% English is enough - 0% Not necessary - 0%

Most students agree that English is enough for international communication and comfortable existence. American students have English in their repertoire as a native or national language. Russian citizens must learn it as a compulsory subject at the secondary school. Moreover, starting 2020, English will be included in the list of required state exams to qualify for the Certificate of Complete General Secondary Education. In their comments Russian students mentioned that they absolutely need English for the academic purposes (applications, research, conferences). However, more than 75% of them plan to live and find employment in Russia, so after graduation the use of English will limited and required only for traveling, entertainment (movies, music, games), or international interactions (social nets, online orders, global web content).

Respondents in both groups agreed that knowing more than one foreign language is either 'absolutely necessary', around 35%, or 'desirable'. The propensity to learn another language by foreign students who took part in the survey can be viewed as quite predictable, since they have already demonstrated their personal desire to spend the time and effort on learning the Russian language. It explains why the option 'desirable' was chosen by 65% of them, in contrast to 30% in Gr1, and the option "English is enough" was not chosen at all. The US students at FLAS usually know their hereditary language and Spanish. European students usually have a good command of European languages. Russian speakers mentioned to know some German, French, Chinese and ethnic languages. The need to learn a second foreign language students associate with the individual circumstances like career prospects, social contacts, personal preferences, and specific tasks.

Judging by comments, the attitude of the Russian students have changed after they got immersed in the multilingual environment at FLAS and participated in the cross-cultural activities in their foreign language classes. Russian speakers were proud to mention that they knew 'a few words or phrases' in Asian or European languages (French and German were the leaders, followed by Swedish, Chinese, Japanese) or from the ethnic languages like Chuvash, Bashkir, Saami. However, it was just enough for them to become aware of linguistic and cultural diversity, not to learn the language to use it.

Students will not be students if they miss the opportunity to ease their lives, so many students sincerely admitted switching to their native language, Russian or English respectively, when they got a chance. Foreign students come to SPBU to study Russian, so they are more motivated to practice it outside the class room. This explains high frequency and longer duration of their use of the Russian language reflected in the responses. 10% of the foreign students even claimed to use Russian all the time. For Russian-speakers there is no need to use any foreign language to survive, so they choose English only to fulfill their course assignments. Byelorussians and Ukrainians experienced no problems switching into Russian because of the common Slavic roots. Tatars, the Chuvash, or even the Tadzhik, the Kyrgyz, and the Turkmen felt the same, because they learn Russian at school and encounter it in their everyday lives. The situation is different for Asian students whose command of English or Russian is usually not very good. Moreover, other students do not speak their native languages (in our case Chinese, BasaJawa).

One more reason for Russian-speaking students to choose English as a means of communication with their foreign peers is the almost total lack of speaking practice in any foreign language, including English. As a result, the opportunity to have a face-to-face communication in English is highly valued by most of the respondents with 92% of Russian-speaking students mentioning it as the top reason for switching into English in interpersonal communication. To provide more conversational practice, informal sessions with American students from Bard College are organized. The American tutors meet any interested FLAS student for two

hours every afternoon. It requires a small fee covered by Bard College and some time and support from the FLAS faculty to make the necessary arrangements like information, schedule, rooms, etc. The rest is up to students. They choose the topics for conversation, have question and answer sessions, just get to know each other. The results of such meetings soon become noticeable in the English class.

All the students unanimously agreed that the knowledge of many languages is a valuable resource; and each language they know deserves to be taken into account. A next step will be to implement the discussed approaches and continue the research that can contribute to improving our knowledge of multilingualism in the university context.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Multilingual approach in FLT and the development of the multicultural space at FLAS has provided new ways to increase the language learning outcomes. The survey findings revealed that both teachers and students generally had a favorable opinion of the multilingual and multicultural practices. They described the experience as rewarding and contributing to the improvement in L1, L2 language skills, multilingual and multicultural collaborative learning skills. It also raised the awareness of the cultural diversity of the university population and their own linguistic repertoires.

The findings of this research will hopefully provide a valuable insight into the benefits and challenges of multilingualism in language education and serve as guidance to the faculty, administration, and policy makers to prepare the fertile soil for the development of multicultural and multilingual environment in a higher educational institute.

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