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Features of the content and organization of extracurricular activities in universities (on the example of the Russian as a foreign language Olympiad)

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Abstract. *Introduction.* Teaching Russian as a foreign language in various universities is a modern and advanced research area. At the same time, much attention is paid not only to the classroom, but also to the independent work of students. One of the forms of extracurricular work is the preparation and conduct of Olympiads in Russian as a foreign language. *The purpose* of the article is to consider and to compare the peculiarities of organization and content of Russian as a foreign language Olympiads. We provide a description and comparative analysis of Russian as a foreign language Olympiads at the universities of different professional orientation: at the Ufa Law Institute of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia and at Shukhov Belgorod State Technological University. Also, we emphasize the advantages of such events and determining the prospects for their use in modern conditions. The article raises the question of using the Olympiad assignments as one of the ways of checking the level of linguistic and professional competence, increasing the motivation of students; the role and place of subject Olympiads in education and personal development of foreigners is analyzed. The application of *methods* of theoretical analysis, synthesis and comparison, as well as statistical analysis helped to achieve the objectives. *Results.* The content of Olympiad assignments should necessarily include the analysis of professionally oriented texts, as well as tasks for controlling the skills of monological and dialogic speech. Analysis of the errors of foreigners helps the teacher to adjust the methodology of classes in Russian as a foreign language. The materials of this article can become the basis for discussions regarding the forms, methods, amounts and content of Russian as a foreign language Olympiads in various universities. In the long term, we can point out the discussion about the conduct of interuniversity Olympiads in the distance format in connection with the transition of many universities in our country to the distance and combined learning format.

Keywords: Russian as a foreign language; learning motivation; extracurricular activity; Olympiad assignments; communicative and professional competence

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Особенности содержания и организации внеаудиторной работы в вузах (на примере проведения олимпиады по русскому языку как иностранному)

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Аннотация. *Введение.* Обучение русскому языку как иностранному (РКИ) в различных вузах является актуальной и перспективной областью для исследования. При этом большое внимание уделяется не только аудиторной, но и самостоятельной работе обучающихся. Одной из форм внеаудиторной работы является подготовка и проведение олимпиад по РКИ. *Целью статьи* является рассмотрение и сравнительный анализ особенностей проведения и содержания олимпиад по русскому языку как иностранному в вузах различной профессиональной направленности: Уфимском юридическом институте МВД России (далее – УЮИ) и Белгородском государственном технологическом университете имени В.Г. Шухова (далее – БГТУ), а также выявление преимуществ подобного рода мероприятий и определение перспектив их использования в современных условиях. В статье поднимается вопрос об использовании олимпиадных заданий по РКИ как одним из способов проверки уровня сформированности языковой и профессиональной компетенции, а также повышения мотивации обучающихся; анализируется роль и место предметных олимпиад в образовании и личностном становлении инофонов. Применение *методов* теоретического анализа, синтеза и сравнения, а также статистический анализ помогли достижению поставленных задач. *Результаты.* Содержание олимпиадных заданий должно обязательно включать анализ профессионально ориентированных текстов, также задания на контроль навыков монологической и диалогической речи. Анализ ошибок инофонов помогает преподавателю корректировать методику проведения занятий по РКИ. Предполагается, что материалы данной работы могут стать основой для дискуссий относительно форм, методов, объемов и содержания олимпиад по РКИ в различных вузах. В качестве перспектив можно обозначить дискуссию относительно проведения межвузовских олимпиад по РКИ в дистанционном формате в связи с переходом многих вузов нашей страны на дистанционный и смешанный формат обучения.

Ключевые слова: русский язык как иностранный; мотивация обучения; внеаудиторная работа; олимпиадные задания; коммуникативная и профессиональная компетенции

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Introduction. One of the most effective forms of extracurricular work closely related to the educational process is the Olympiad. It is a special type of work that is included in the process of the Russian as a foreign language subject oriented instruction, supplements it and can serve as a method of teaching of professional communication in Russian, as a method of consolidation of the new material and as a way of control the professional knowledge acquisition.

Conducting of Olympiads allows to diversify the educational process, make it more intense, it stimulates active involvement of foreigners in educational process, helps to establish a connection between the studying of the Russian language and special disciplines (Yukhimenko, 2019: 214, Rakhimova, 2016: 145). Moreover, the competitive component increases the quality of education, which means “a social category that determines the state and effectiveness of the educational process in society, its compliance with the needs and expectations of various social groups and of individual professional competencies formation” (Vakhitova, 2013: 37). The effectiveness of such work depends largely on the degree of involvement of the listener in the process of solving the assigned tasks.

Preparation for Olympiads requires colossal efforts not only on the part of students and teachers, but also on the part of the department and the university as a whole. We can say that holding Olympiads at the international and Russian national level promotes competitiveness of the university, emphasizing its status (Anipkina, 2018: 366).

Major universities of the country hold Olympiads in Russian as a foreign language annually, any student can join them. Traditionally

they are held at the Pushkin State Russian Language Institute, National Research University – Higher School of Economics, Ural State Pedagogical University (together with the Teachers' House of the Ural Federal District and the Institute of Philology, Cultural Studies and Intercultural Communication, Yekaterinburg), The Southwest State University (under the auspices of the Association of Foreign Students of Russia), Northern Arctic Federal University. The international online Olympiad in Russian as a foreign language, regularly held by St. Petersburg State University, is recognized as one of the largest. The Olympiad for foreign students of preparatory faculties is held by Kazan Federal University. Interuniversity student Olympiads are held within the walls of Tyumen State University (together with the Tyumen regional public organization “Center for the Development of Leadership and Project Competencies”), at Lobachevsky State University of Nizhny Novgorod. And the list goes on.

One of the major international online Olympiad of Russian as a foreign language is regularly held by St. Petersburg State University. The Olympiad for foreign students of preparatory faculties is held by Kazan Federal University. Interuniversity student Olympiads are held at Tyumen State University (together with the Tyumen regional public organization “Center for the Development of Leadership and Project Competencies”), at Lobachevsky State University of Nizhny Novgorod.

It should be mentioned that a foreign citizen who has just arrived in the Russian Federation, experiences a cultural and linguistic shock: he/she is not only unable to look for *distance* Olympiad platforms, but also he/she does not always have an opportunity to do it. In this regard,

holding intra-university Olympiads in Russian as a foreign language helps, on the one hand, to interest foreign students, to increase their interpersonal interaction, and on the other hand, to understand how effectively the teaching process is built. Such language competitions can become a form of alternative evaluation of students' knowledge (Bolshakova, 2019).

Methodology and methods. Description and comparative analysis of Russian as a foreign language Olympiads among foreign students, which were held in 2020 at the Ufa Law Institute of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia and at Shukhov Belgorod State Technological University. There were employed the methods of statistical analysis of empirical material, the synthesis of methodological literature and regulatory documents, abstraction, modeling and forecasting, as well as pedagogical observation, testing and analysis.

Research Results and Discussion. Let us first *consider* the experience of holding annual interuniversity Olympiads in Russian as a foreign language at the Ufa Law Institute of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation and Shukhov Belgorod State Technological University. The purpose of these Olympiads (except for the general didactic ones mentioned above) is to check the level of language and professional competence of future specialists.

Organizing the Olympiad includes several stages:

1) Preparatory stage (drawing up the Regulation on the Olympiad, the Order for holding an Olympiad, preparing the assignments, discussing and approving the evaluating criteria, preparing assignment and answer forms).

2) The main stage (one or several rounds).

3) Final stage (grading of works, summing up, awarding the winners).

The Olympiad at the Ufa Law Institute of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation is held by the Department of Foreign and Russian Languages at the end of the first semester, when the students have time to revise lexical and grammar material (before enrolling the 1st year, foreign students have two years of

language courses according to an additional general educational program for preparing foreign specialists to master humanitarian professional programs in the Russian language).

As a rule, full-time students from 1 to 4 year take part in the Olympiad at will, however, the experience proves that the participants, are the strongest, most motivated and interested in educational process among other students.

Our experience showed that every year the quantity of participants increases at about 10% (the quantity of participants at the 2020 – 84 %, 2019 – 71 %, 2018 – 66%). We interviewed the participants and found that the preparation for the Olympiad is an additional motivation for learning a foreign language.

Besides, every student wanted to get the diploma of the participant of the Olympiad and an award from the head of the institute during the official ceremony. From our point of view such type of motivation interests only certified listeners.

Students prepare for the Olympiad themselves, but teachers also revise grammar material during the lessons and give some texts to read at home.

Materials prepared by the department teachers include various assignments: those requiring observation and generalization of facts, ingenuity, the ability to think logically; based on knowledge of Russian grammar and professional vocabulary; involving linguistic and cultural analysis of the text, as well as assignments of a creative nature.

The Olympiad was held in the traditional format: the students were in the classroom, the rules of the conduction of the Olympiad and the requirements were explained to them, the assignments were briefly commented on. Then several observers distribute assignment sheets and answer sheets. Those students who took part in the Olympiad for the first time experienced certain difficulties with filling in the forms. In this regard, teachers began to use forms of this kind at the lessons during reading and analyzing various texts.

The Olympiad lasts 90 minutes. Answers are marked on special control sheets (forms). As a rule, the Olympiad consists of three parts.

The first part is an analysis of a professionally oriented text containing special vocabulary: reading, true or false statements, comprehension of the text and professional words and phraseological (stable) phrases, a kind of “semantic guessing”, choosing synonyms for the highlighted words in the text.

The second part is focused on knowledge of the lexical and grammatical norms of the modern Russian language. The listeners should pass a test in which they need to choose the correct answer from several proposed variants.

The third part of the Olympiad assignments allows to determine the professional communication skills of students, knowledge of the culture and traditions of the target-language country (norms of speech etiquette), as well as the ability to compose a written text. The activities of lawyers are connected with the preparation of a large number of business papers, we propose, for example, to write an application for employment that observes all requirements of *official style* of documents.

Based on the results of the Olympiad, only 3 winners with the highest number of points are elected. We believe that all participants should receive diplomas, as it is in other universities.

As an example, the text (shortened) of the Olympiad assignment of the VI intra-university Olympiad of Russian as a foreign language (November 2020) is presented in [Appendix 1](#).

A feature of the content of the assignments at the Ufa Law Institute of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia is that all assignments have a professional focus: they contain professional terminological (legal) and phraseological units and are focused on the analysis of specific professional assignments.

The results of the Olympiad show that all the participants accomplished the assignments. The 3rd assignment caused some difficulties: not all participants understood it and wrote the required quantity of words and phrases. Only 10% of the respondents wrote an application in accordance with the necessary details and registration rules, despite the fact that these features are studied by foreign citizens in the course named “The Russian language in business documentation” (there is a confusion of the concepts of

“speech etiquette” and “business etiquette”: practically in every application were used the etiquette formulas: thanks, thank you, please). The assignment on comprehension the professionally oriented text also caused some difficulty: only one student got more than 50% of correct answers. The grammar test did not cause any particular difficulties (80% of the students succeeded).

This allowed teachers of Russian as a foreign language to conclude that the professional communicative competence of the students is formed at an insufficient level and more time should be devoted to commented reading, retelling and writing of professional texts of various styles, a necessity of increasing the amount of written creative works among foreign students. The study of professional language materials establishes a two-way relationship between the desire to acquire specialized knowledge and success in mastering the language (Maksimova, 2020: 795). In addition, the analysis of the results of the Olympiad assignments, in our opinion, can become a separate type of classroom and extracurricular work which helps to improve the professional communicative competence of foreign students (for more details: Nikitina, 2018).

It should be mentioned that the Olympiad at the Ufa Law Institute did not check the level of speech skills and abilities. It is explained by the duration of the Olympiad – 90 minutes. But it can be realized if the Olympiad is held in two stages using remote technologies and technical devices.

In the second round, 10 best students can be offered oral speech assignments: compose a monologue on a definite topic, answer questions, ask each other questions, compose a dialogue or a polylogue. Topics of oral speech assignments can be designated (for example: Tell me about .../how do you think, is it important .../How do you feel about ...), or they can be formulated in the form of a specific communicative assignment.

For example, your laptop is missing from your dorm room. Ask questions to your room/floor neighbors; call the police; inform the dormitory commandant/head of the course, etc.

These assignments should also have a certain professional orientation.

The Olympiad of Russian as a foreign language, which is held at Shukhov Belgorod State Technological University, by the Department of the Russian Language and Intercultural Communication, is an interuniversity Olympiad among students of preparatory faculties. It is focused on raising the interest of foreign citizens in Russia, its language and culture, strengthening the status of the Russian language as a language of international communication, creation of strong stable *motivation* of foreign citizens towards the development of cognitive activities, popularizing the Russian language, Russian literature and culture as a means of strengthening international humanitarian contacts. Testing professional competence is not the main goal here, students of different specialties take part in the Olympiad. Each faculty has got a separate curriculum but no data was found of a generalized one which has to be followed, this way each language professor decides what is best for the classroom without having a state template to follow (Fisnike Pllana, 2021: 86). The rules and procedure also differ from the Olympiad at the Ufa Law Institute of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation.

The Olympiad is held in the second semester (April-May) in the traditional international festival “Our Home is Planet Earth”, it has 2 stages: distant and *face-to-face* tours. During the elimination round foreign students who have an insufficient level of knowledge of the Russian language are “are *dropping out*”. This stage of the Olympiad includes passing of an online test on vocabulary, phraseology and grammar of the Russian language, as well as assignments of a creative plan, which evaluate the participant's ability to understand the assignment and compose a coherent text on a specific topic.

Examples of assignments of the elimination round are presented in [Appendix 2](#).

Writing an essay is not only a good way to evaluate the level of language proficiency, but also to rate the creativity of a foreign student. As material for the video, on the basis of which the essay should be written, most often a social video on a relevant topic is used (the threat of terrorism, environmental problems of our time, love, friendship, the problem of “fathers and children”, the Internet and its role in the life of a modern person and etc.). This creative assignment is evaluated according to the criteria given in Table.

Table

Essay evaluation criteria

	Criteria	Note	Points
Content	The words limit should not be less than 100 words and should not exceed 200 words	– points are deducted	- 5
	Relevance of the topic	– in case of inconsistency with the topic of the essay points are deducted	0 – 40
	Originality of the idea		0 – 20
	<i>Consistency of the essay</i>		0 – 20
Language	Variety of used language means	– using of phraseological units, complex and complicated sentences, the richness of the vocabulary, etc.	0 – 20
	Total points		0 – 100
	Deducted points		

	Criteria	Note	Points
	Communicatively significant errors	– mistakes preventing understanding of the text	-1 for each
	Communicatively insignificant errors	– mistakes that do not prevent understanding of the text	-0,5 for each
	Communicatively insignificant phonetic errors	– should be underlined in the text, but not marked in the margin	

The checking of students' works showed that the first point of the criteria is the main one: 100 points are given for the compliance of the essay with the video plot, 0 points for non-compliance. If the work corresponds to the video, then a certain number of points (corresponding to this criterion) is deducted from the starting 100 points for violation of the following points of the criteria. If the work does not match the video and scores 0 points, then it is not checked further.

The winners of this Olympiad are the students who got the highest points in each of the stages. Moreover, in stage it is supposed to award nominations. Based on the results of the competition "Essays on a Video Plot", it is possible to assign the following nominations:

- 1) "For deep coverage of the topic" (a detailed retelling of what he saw using a variety of vocabulary and a variety of syntactic constructions);
- 2) "Originality of presentation";
- 3) "For possession of competent written speech" (writing without mistakes or a minimum number of mistakes).

Among the nominations of the competition "Test in Linguistic and Cultural Studies" there are the following:

- 1) For knowledge of Russian culture;
- 2) For knowledge of Russian history;
- 3) For knowledge of Russian heraldry.

The results of this Olympiad in different years show that the percentage of elimination at the 1st stage of the Olympiad is about 35-40%, which is explained by a rather high degree of complexity of assignments, their orientation on deep knowledge of the culture of Russia and its achievements.

As for the main stage, the analysis of the results shows that about 60% of the participants

cope with the assignments in linguistic and cultural studies. This is due to the fact that experienced teachers preparing their students for the Olympiad devote a lot of time in the classroom and during extracurricular time to the formation of the linguocultural competence of students. Teachers have to be professionally trained and higher institutions should compile more culture-based curricula (Fisnike Pllana, 2021: 74).

Especially difficult is to write and then to check the essay. This stage of the Olympiad shows the level of the students' language competence: only 10-15% of the works of foreign students are considered as applicants for a place or nomination. Works containing a large number of communicatively significant and communicatively insignificant mistakes, composed illogically, characterized by poor vocabulary and repetitive grammatical constructions are eliminated.

Based on many years of experience in holding such events, we can say that students of preparatory faculties have great difficulties in mastering the grammatical norms of the Russian language. Moreover, students of humanitarian and economic profiles have better results than students of technical and medical profiles. This can be explained by the fact that students of humanitarian and economic profiles have more class-room academic hours in the Russian language, different degrees of student motivation. Such results stimulate leading teachers to revise the educational program, priorities should be set correctly, balance educational and extracurricular work with foreign students.

Thus, the Olympiad at Shukhov Belgorod State Technological University, in contrast to the Ufa Law Institute of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia has different participants: these are students of different directions and

specialties. In this regard, we offer general communicative assignments without focusing on the future profession. As part of the pre-university education, the Olympiad at Shukhov Belgorod State Technological University serves as a means of drawing attention to the Russian language and culture, acts as a tool for intercultural communication, supports the international status of the Russian language, strengthens linguistic and cultural contacts between people of different cultures, and forms the motivation to study the Russian language.

The professional interests of the participants of the Olympiad are not of decisive importance. For the jury, it is important to check the level of formation of linguistic and cultural competencies, to assess the creativity of students. The content of the Olympiad is focused on the country-specific component of the discipline "Russian as a foreign language".

Olympiads held among first and second-year students at the Ufa Law Institute acquire a professional focus, the focus is shifting to testing the formation of the language and professional competence of future specialists. It determines the professional orientation of assignments.

The Olympiads described above have different goals and objectives and they are targeted at different audiences. In this regard, they have different regulations and content. But each of them helps to interact between the teacher and the foreign student beyond the educational process, which makes this interaction more comfortable and interesting.

Conclusion. In general, it can be argued that the Olympiad is a right direction in teaching the Russian language and in adapting to a new environment. It makes the educational process more diverse and interesting, helps to activate the creative abilities of foreign citizens, develops independence and promotes a conscious attitude to the educational process, increases their motivation. The Olympiad assignments of a communicative orientation give an opportunity not to be limited by the test assignments, but to reveal the creative and professional potential of students maximally, use innovative (including distance) technologies, use cultural and lin-

guocultural knowledge necessary in professional activities, as for the students, they realize and evaluate the acquired professional knowledge, abilities and skills. The Olympiad is an important factor in the formation of the basic qualities of a competitive specialist, his communicative culture, and it also helps to introduce foreigners to the educational process and foreign language cultural environment.

Thus, the jury of the Olympiad evaluates the development of the communicative competence of students.

The authors came to the conclusion that the Olympiads are an excellent form of extracurricular work with foreign students, which allows not only to test the creativity of students, the level of formation of their language and professional competence, but also to increase significantly the motivation to study Russian.

Analysis of the results of the Olympiads made it possible to evaluate the adequacy of the proposed assignments and the feasibility of including them in the content of the Olympiad assignments: at the pre-university stage, it is advisable to include assignments on knowledge of vocabulary, language grammar and general communication skills. When conducting Olympiads among 1st-2nd-year students, it is necessary to focus on professional communication assignments.

A comparative analysis of the two Olympiads led to the conclusion that it is convenient to conduct Olympiads in Russian as a foreign language in a mixed format: the use of technical means greatly simplifies the conduction of Olympiads and checking of the materials.

Moreover, modern conditions dictate the use of distance learning technologies, which freely involve third-party audio, video and visual content. When working online with the help of widely distributed, freely available programs such as TestPad online and the like, the verification of test plan assignments is fully automated, the subjectivity of the assessment and the so-called "human factor" are eliminated as much as possible.

The distance format of the Olympiads allows to optimize the organizational preparation for them, saves time and material resources.

The distance format allows to expand the geography of participants, raises the status of the event to the international level, and helps to establish and strengthen contacts between participating universities. In addition, we believe that it is advisable to hold interuniversity Olympiads in Russian as a foreign language among students of the same specialty which will make possible to monitor the level of their professional speech skills.

It gives a possibility to adjust the activities of the teacher, to balance educational and extracurricular work. The popularization of the distance format for holding many events, including Olympiads, expands the contingent of participants, allows to diversify assignments, optimize the work of the jury, etc. Modern information technologies contribute to a comprehensive and adequate verification of almost all types of speech activity, which makes the assessment complex and increases its objectivity.

It is assumed that the materials of this work can become the basis for discussions regarding the forms, methods and content of interuniversity (and international) Russian as a foreign language Olympiads in distance and mixed format.

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